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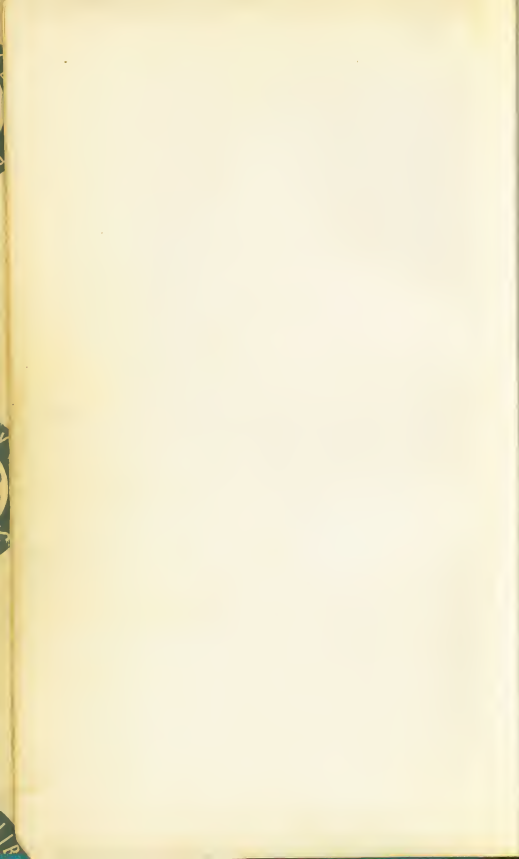
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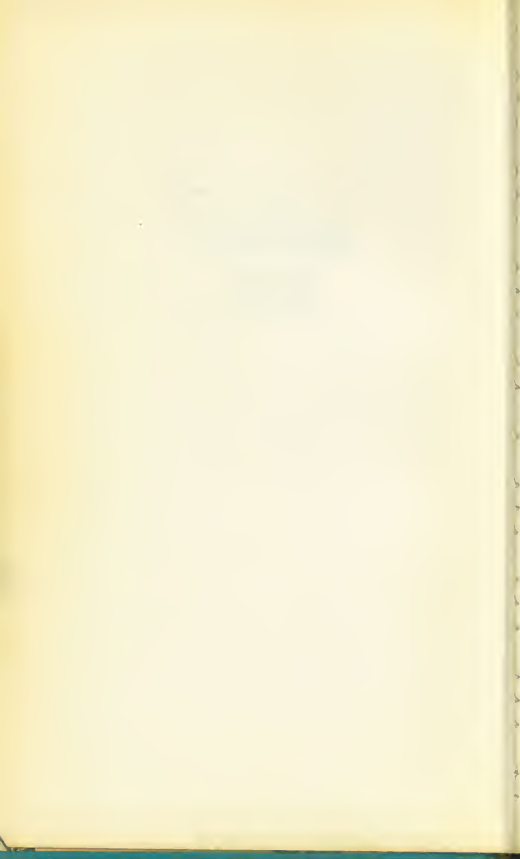
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**MAGICIAN'S  
MAGIC**

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# MAGICIAN'S MAGIC

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BY  
PAUL CURRY

INTRODUCTION BY  
MARTIN GARDNER

ILLUSTRATED BY  
JULIO GRANDA

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FRANKLIN WATTS, INC.  
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## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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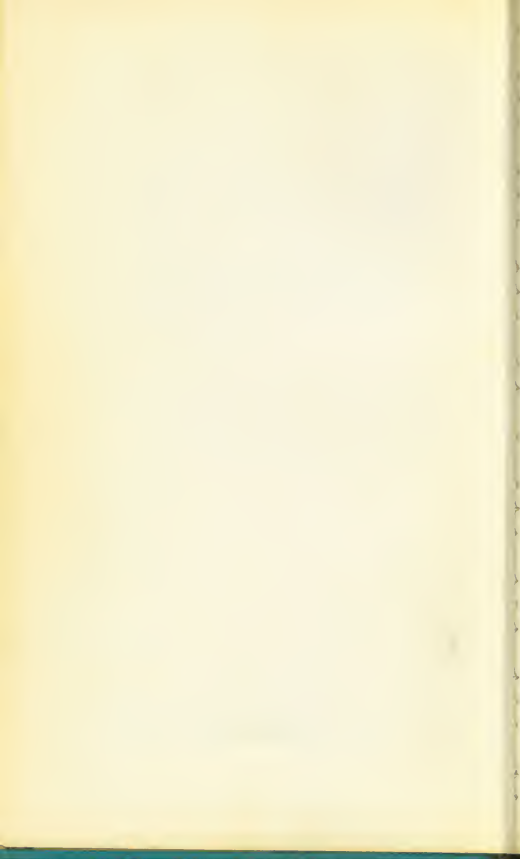
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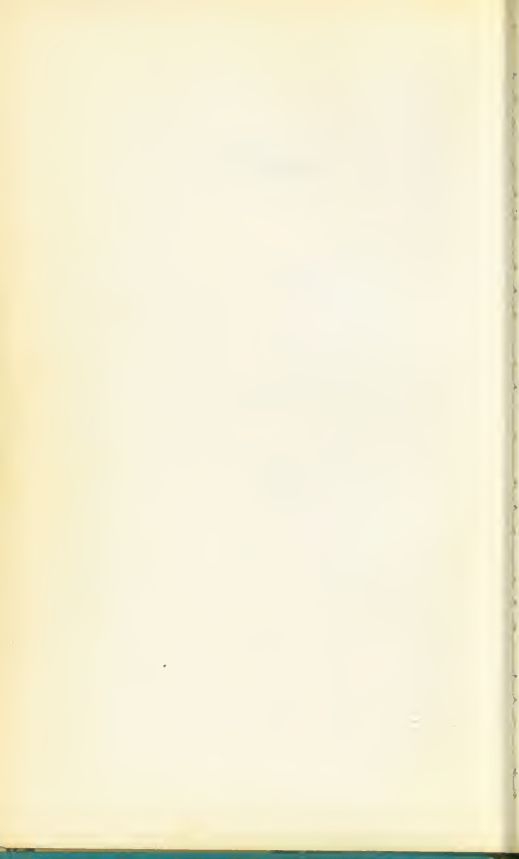
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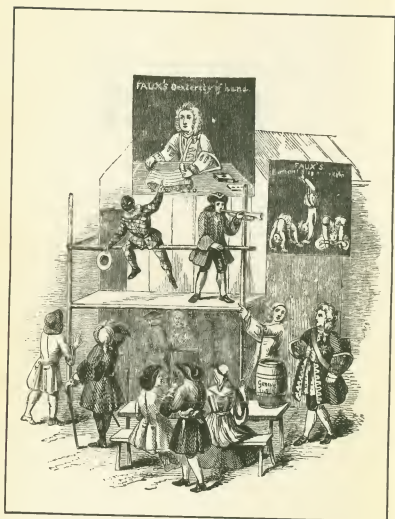
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**MAGICIAN'S  
MAGIC**

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# INTRODUCTION

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*MAGICIAN'S MAGIC* is an appropriate title for this book because the author, Paul Curry, is surely one of the world's best-known "magician's magicians." He is not a professional performer. He does not give magic shows or appear on television. Yet it would be hard to find a professional magician or serious amateur who does not know of Paul Curry and his many contributions to the conjuring art.

Ever since he caught his first glimpse of the wonder-world of magic, as a boy at Coney Island, Curry has been one of magic's most active, most creative devotees. His specialty is what magicians call "close-up magic": tricks with ordinary objects such as cards and coins, performed at a distance of only a few feet from the spectators. Friends of Mr. Curry can testify to his consummate skill in this type of conjuring. But more than this, for some thirty years he has been inventing tricks and sleights of such beautiful simplicity that they have become standard items in the repertoire of close-up performers throughout the world.

The most famous of Curry's tricks is a truly astounding card effect known as "Out of This World." I remember well the sensation it created in magic circles when it first appeared in a booklet published by Curry in 1942. The trick introduced a new principle in card magic. Scores of variations and new effects based on the principle were devised — are still being devised — by card experts. Only a few weeks ago I saw in one of the many magic periodicals a description of still another twist on "Out of this World." The reader for whom this book is a first introduction to the bewildering, colorful, complex world of modern magic is fortunate indeed to find here, straight from the inventor himself, an entire chapter devoted to this remarkable trick.

Among the many subtle card sleights originated by Curry, the best known is a "move" for secretly switching one card for another in the act of turning it over on a table. Known in the trade as the "Curry turnover change," it is now an essential move in modern card manipulation. *Close-up Card Magic*, a recent hard-cover treatise by the New York City magician and memory expert, Harry Lorayne, has a section of more than fifty pages devoted exclusively to tricks based on Curry's turnover change. Unfortunately, it is a difficult move to master and for that reason it is not included in this book.

Curry has also wisely excluded from his book any close-up tricks that require special supplies or equipment obtainable only from magic stores. One of his most popular effects, involving a penny and dime and known as "Curry's IOU," is not described here because it requires what magicians call "flash paper." Readers interested in this, as well as in more advanced magic

## INTRODUCTION

invented by Curry, will find such tricks described in his earlier book for professionals, *Something Borrowed, Something New*.

Although Curry has chosen for the close-up magic of this book only tricks which do not demand special skills or apparatus, you must not suppose them inferior on that account. They are of the highest quality; each heightened by details and angles of misdirection that give a characteristic "Curry touch" to the effect. For example, the unusual principle involved in the cut and restored string trick explained in Chapter 8 is not original with Curry, but he has added so many clever twists that it becomes almost a new effect. The underlying principle, incidentally, is unknown outside the magic fraternity; indeed, even many magicians do not know it.

Similarly, the cord and washer trick in Chapter 9 is an old effect that has been performed in hundreds of different ways. But to it Curry has added a subtle idea of his own, here explained for the first time, that transforms the trick into one that is likely to fool even a well-informed magician if he is not aware of what has been added. The three-card prediction in Chapter 11 also exploits old principles, but they are combined in a typically Curry manner to produce an unusually convincing feat of pseudo precognition. And there are other masterpieces of deception here that are almost entirely the product of Curry's ingenious, offbeat thinking. His method of coding information for the celebrated telephone card trick in Chapter 10 is unlikely to be surpassed. The book's final trick, embodying an amusing mathematical paradox, is so perplexing that the magician himself is likely to be fooled the first time he makes a practice run.

But *Magician's Magic* is much more than a collection

of close-up marvels. It ranges over the entire field of magic, from the great stage illusions of the masters and the work of such escape artists as Houdini, to the methods of mediums and mentalists. Curry lets the reader in on some (not all!) of the secrets behind the floating lady, the lady sawed in half, Houdini's famous feat of walking through a brick wall, the spirit cabinet of the Davenport brothers, and many other world-famous stage illusions.

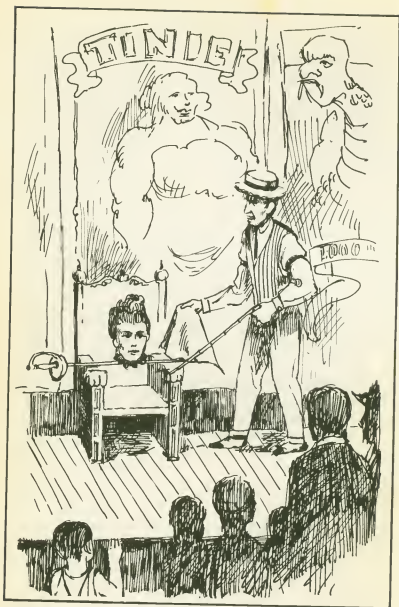
The first five chapters, together with sections that weave in and out of the tricks described in later chapters, sketch a veritable history of magic from ancient Egyptian times to the present. It is a fabulous history, told with touches of poetry and humor, and sprinkled with wise, authoritative observations by a man who knows magic, from top hat to bottom deal, in all its fantastic variety; a man who is himself partly responsible for that variety. I know of no recent book on magic, addressed to laymen, that is so gracefully and entertainingly written, that reveals so many inside secrets, that conveys so vividly the peculiar feel and fascination of this extraordinary and eternal art.

*Hastings-on-Hudson*  
*New York*

*Martin Gardner*







*"It was, the boy thought, the most wonderful thing he had seen in all of his nine years."*

# BY WAY OF BACKGROUND

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“Step up, folks. I have it right here, wrapped in this ancient Egyptian temple cloth. The marvel of the Ages — the eighth, ninth, and tenth wonders of the world.”

The sideshow barker, as he strutted back and forth on the platform adjoining the boardwalk, was holding up a bulky, egg-shaped object, loosely wrapped in a cloth that looked neither ancient nor Egyptian. His voice rose shrill and clear above the whirling music of the merry-go-round, the distant squeals of riders on the plunging roller coaster cars, the low pounding of the surf, the deep steady hum of a huge seaside crowd relaxing and enjoying itself on a balmy, sunny afternoon back in the late summer of 1926.

“Come in closer, folks, it’s absolutely free. Yes, in just a moment or two, I’m going to reveal — right here on this platform — the most incredible sight you’ve ever seen. Believe me, ladies and gentlemen, when I unwrap this cloth, you are going to see something that will make you rub your eyes in astonishment. You are

going to see a living, breathing head. A head that laughs, talks, sings. Yes, it even whistles."

Strollers along the boardwalk paused out of curiosity, and then lazily edged in closer. The man was going to show them a live head. Silly? Impossible? Sure it was, but what could they lose — it was free, wasn't it?

Up in front of the gathering crowd stood a young boy just tall enough for his chin to rest on the edge of the platform. The man's words no longer interested the boy. He had heard the barker's spiel again and again that summer, whenever his parents brought him and his brothers to the seashore.

No, the attraction for the youngster was not in what the man said, but in what he knew the man was about to do. The boy had long since memorized every gesture, every step, every motion the man would make as soon as he had finished telling all those lies about how good the show was, and why you should rush right up and buy a ticket.

He knew that the man would call attention to the long gleaming sword that rested across the arms of the big red thronelike chair standing at the back of the platform. He knew that the man would lightly rest the cloth-covered object on the edge of the sword — this was the part the boy watched the closest — and would suddenly yank the cloth away to reveal the head of a pretty girl — a very much alive one — neatly balanced on the edge of the sword. As promised, the head would sing and laugh and carry on a conversation.

The boy knew also that after a minute or two, the man would reverse his previous actions, would rewrap the head in the cloth, would lift it from the sword, and

would leave the platform with the head tucked under his arm.

It was, the boy thought, the most wonderful thing he had seen in all of his nine years.

On this day, however, something new was added. Possibly because of the end-of-season falloff in attendance, the barker promised that anyone buying a ticket would be permitted to step up on the platform and see how the trick was done. The youngster couldn't believe that he had heard correctly. A chance to learn the answer to the wonderful puzzle that had been tantalizing him all summer! He was off like a shot, only to return quickly, half-dragging a reluctant father who dutifully bought two tickets and lifted his son onto the platform so that the boy could steal a behind-the-scenes glimpse of how a head could be made to exist without a body.

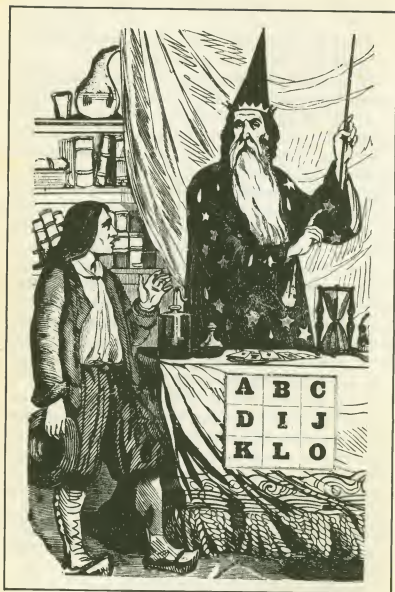
And now that the long-awaited secret was revealed,\* the boy found himself entranced by the sheer brilliance of it all. Why, he wondered, was there so much talk about Edison and Marconi and other so-called great men, when there were geniuses around who could invent *real* miracles such as this?

As it turned out, the boy would never forget that first glimpse into the world of magic. The fascination of that moment was to remain with him always, never lessening, but, in fact, deepening as his years and his knowledge of the subject increased.

Then one day there came the idea of sharing some of the things he had learned, an idea that others might also be caught up in the fascination of this most ancient of the arts — the art of magic.

And that is why he wrote this book.

\* See page 103.



*The wizard represented himself as a fountainhead of all knowledge. He knew the secrets of the past, present, and future.*

# THE OLD, OLD TRICKS

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**T**o begin with, what is magic?

Magic, the dictionary tells us, is an ancient art intended to control or influence nature or natural events. It is practiced by wizards, witches, and sorcerers who call upon the aid of devils and the spirits of the dead. On the other hand, conjuring, legerdemain, and prestidigitation are the accomplishment of the seemingly impossible by natural means.

This book deals with natural rather than unnatural matters. Despite the dictionary, however, people today rarely bother to make a distinction between magic as sorcery (the supernatural) and magic as performance of the light hand (legerdemain) and the quick fingers (presto-digit action). People think of magic as tricks, and magicians as the performers of such tricks.

There was a time, however, when magic, to the majority of the earth's inhabitants, was a real and fearful thing—an evil art built around chants, rituals, and mystic spells. It promised everything, delivered nothing and, without a shred of evidence to justify its

existence, continued on down through the centuries wielding an influence so profound that its effects are woven into the fabric of history.

Just when magic began, no one knows for certain. It is generally believed to have started back in the misty past when our primitive ancestors first wandered the earth. To early man everything must have been magic. Thunder, lightning, the moaning of the wind, sickness, death — all were threats, all were mysteries. And because he did not understand, he was afraid. With his fellow wanderers he huddled in caves, trembling at the noises of the night, and wondering at the magic all about him. And so the stage was set for the entrance of the wizards, sorcerers, and soothsayers who concocted and brought with them chants, spells, rituals, and dire warnings of vengeful gods. As the centuries passed, these self-appointed masters of the unknown became all-powerful and were greatly feared. Even when others ruled, the royal soothsayers or tribal medicine men held positions of high authority and exercised great influence. For what mere mortal, no matter what his wealth or power, would dare oppose those who knew and practiced the black art?

And yet, if we take a long view of history we find that these same charlatans, mountebanks, and mystics who so played upon ignorance and fear actually have emerged as benefactors of mankind. For in developing new ways to impress their followers, they also fashioned the foundations of the sciences. The potion mixer and herb gatherer, as the years passed, became the pharmacist and chemist. Witch doctors eventually laid aside their masks and drums and, instead of frightening away devils, sought more practical methods of



curing man's ills. Stargazing prophets began to note patterns and movements in the heavens, and the sciences of astronomy and mathematics took form. Rare indeed is the science—or the art—which does not have its root tips in some medieval ritual or older practice known as magic.

While man may have left most of his primitive mumbo jumbo behind him he has, nevertheless, retained full strength a natural curiosity concerning things he does not understand. It is this curiosity that made Franklin fly his kite, Pasteur peer into his microscope, and Edison recite "Mary had a little lamb" as he cranked away at a funny-looking little machine.

Nor is curiosity confined to the scientist. The average person, not being called upon to solve the problems of nature and the universe, searches out ways to befuddle and bewilder himself. Publishers and editors willingly and profitably oblige by producing a daily avalanche of crossword puzzles, anagrams, riddles, conundrums, picture puzzles, word games and, of course, mystery stories.

Of all attractive forms of self-torment, watching a performance of magic, as we know it today, is unmatched. The reason, of course, is that a magic trick properly performed is a puzzle without a solution, a riddle without an answer, a mystery story minus the last revealing chapter. It leaves the watcher baffled, cliff-hanging. Logically, people should rebel against such mental torture. Actually, they never have rebelled and, past evidence considered, they never will because the performance of magic does more than frustrate and exasperate. It also charms and delights. It charms the clever observer, the intellectual, the sophisticate who

knows himself too wise to believe the unbelievable and yet is amused by his own inability to explain the inexplicable. It delights the young, the unsuspecting, the spectator ready to be amazed at all those bright silk pieces being whisked out of an empty paper cone.

The art of the conjurer has an ancient and impressive history stretching back more than five thousand years to the oldest of written documents in which appear descriptions of performances by Egyptian magicians. True, a strain of highly fanciful fiction runs through these early accounts, but they do, nevertheless, serve to establish conjuring as one of the most ancient forms of planned entertainment. Entertainment, that is, early Egyptian style; it would hardly classify as such by today's standards.

An ancient Egyptian magician named Tettela, for example, displayed a talent for removing and replacing the heads of livestock. After cutting off and restoring the head of a small fowl, with no loss of life in the interim, of course, he proceeded to repeat the act with an assortment of birds and beasts, each larger than the last, until, as a climax, he decapitated an ox and subsequently put matters right again.

The more squeamish of the early Egyptian onlookers may possibly have preferred a gentleman named Tchatchaemankh who commanded a bag of tricks as impressive as his name. On one occasion he ordered the water in a pond to move aside while he strolled out to retrieve a lost jewel. If one assumes that ancient Egypt was governed by the same laws of nature as exist today, this was potent, mighty potent, magic.

Historically more interesting, and certainly more reliable, is a conclusion by experts that a certain drawing on the wall of an Egyptian tomb depicts a magician

## THE OLD, OLD TRICKS

performing a trick known today — as it probably was then — as “The Cups and Balls.” That this trick has managed to withstand the test of fifty centuries is far more amazing than anything magicians have thus far managed to create. In that incredible span of time, whole countries and civilizations have risen, flourished, and faded away, yet this little trick has retained its appeal for generation after generation — right through the entire span of our recorded existence. It is further proof that, while all else may change, man’s curiosity is constant.

And what is this trick with the cups that has so successfully defied the ravages of time?

To begin with, it brings into play most of the basic effects of magic. (An “effect” is a term used by magicians to indicate how a trick appears to the audience.) As the cups and balls trick is performed, objects appear, disappear, multiply, change color and form, and penetrate solids. Three “unprepared” cups, of a design and material varying according to the locale and the era, are shown empty and placed mouths down in a row. Suddenly and mysteriously a small ball appears — magically drawn from the tip of the magician’s wand, or from a spectator’s elbow or ear. Placed under a cup, any cup of the three, the ball disappears only to be found under one of the other cups. Next it doubles and then triples. After a series of bewildering maneuvers with the three balls during which they vanish from the end cups, congregate under the center one, and then find their way, invisibly of course, back to the end cups again — it appears that the trick is over because the magician deliberately and openly places the balls in his pocket.

Then, just as deliberately, as if they had a will of



*An early European street magician performing the "Cups and Balls" trick.*

their own, the balls return under the cups, and the whole thing starts over again. As the trick increases in tempo, even stranger things happen. The balls change color and size and finally are transformed into large fruit or, on occasion, they even become baby chicks or mice. The possibilities are limited only by the degree of skill, experience, and ingenuity of the handler.

To do it as it should be done, the trick with the cups requires long hours of careful, patient practice. It is advanced sleight of hand at its best.

## THE OLD, OLD TRICKS

In the broad span of time between the days of the Egyptian pharaohs and the sixteenth century, conjuring was, at best, a questionable profession carried on by strolling mountebanks who performed their meager assortment of tricks on streets, at fairs, in barns—anywhere their exhibitions might attract a few coins. Now and again an exceptional conjurer would emerge and command a respectable amount of recognition from the public or, on occasion, from the nobles in whose castles he might perform. Still in the hazy future were the happy, more prosperous days when conjuring would achieve the status of legitimate entertainment and be brought in off the streets.

In looking back, it becomes apparent that an obstacle to advancement in the conjurer's art was the complete absence of written material on the subject. For the most part, conjurers were not educated men and few, probably, could read or write. And of those who mastered the written word, no fame or fortune awaited the conjurer who explained his tricks in print. So, unfortunately, the accumulated knowledge of a lifetime died with each individual performer unless he had taken the trouble to pass along his secrets by whispering them in the ear of some promising apprentice. Progress in any endeavor is restricted under such circumstances, and conjuring, despite the need for a high degree of secrecy, was no exception.

Highly significant, therefore, was the publication in London, in 1582, during the reign of Elizabeth I, of a book entitled *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, a section of which explained most of the magic tricks of the day. Oddly, its author, Reginald Scott, was not a magician, had no particular interest in conjuring, and knew noth-

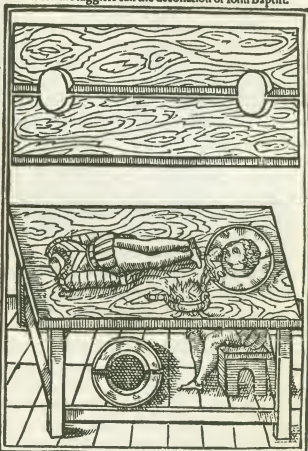
(Figure 3)

13. Booke.

The discoverie

To cut off ones head, and to laie it in a platter,  
which the jugglers call the decollation of Iohn Baptist.

The forme  
of y<sup>e</sup> planks,  
&c.



The order  
of the acti-  
on, as it is  
to be shew-  
ed.

What order is to be obserued for the practising hercol  
with great admiration, read page 349, 350.

¶ The

A page from *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* showing how "jugglers" succeeded in re-creating the decapitation of John the Baptist.

ing of the subject until a few years prior to the publication of his book. At that time he set out to learn as much as he could of "jugglers'" secrets for inclusion in his *Discoverie*.

His purpose was as noble as any for which books have been written: to end the baseless belief that some human beings make pacts with devils and, accordingly, must be destroyed. Scott was appalled by the endless procession of miserable human beings in his own and in previous generations who, after being tortured into a "confession," were declared witches and condemned to the gallows or to the screaming horror of death at the stake. Unlike others who may have shared his revulsion, Scott decided to do something about it. He reasoned that if the people who made and administered laws permitting such atrocities were bodily beyond his reach — their minds were not. To reach their minds, he wrote his book. By exposing methods used by conjurers, he sought to show that the seemingly impossible can be accomplished by natural means, that when one is mystified, the reason is more likely to be that some of the facts are hidden than that devils are present. This courageous man may have won private applause for his efforts to dispel ignorance, but when, some four years after Scott's death, James I ascended the English throne in 1603, he immediately denounced Scott's book and ordered all copies burned. The royal denunciation recognized the dangerous nature of Scott's thinking. As it turned out, however, the king's decree only served to focus attention on the book and thus helped to circulate its message.

Thus is the story of the first book in English to

explain the workings of tricks. For over two hundred years the tricks described by Scott were to appear, at times lifted word for word, in numerous European and American books and pamphlets.

The tricks fall into two sharply defined categories: those based on legitimate principles of deception, and those best described as a hodgepodge of mechanical and scientific oddities that would barely puzzle, much less mystify, today's schoolboys. Among the mechanical tricks, for example, there was the knife or bodkin which supposedly penetrated flesh without injury. Its object was, as Scott expressed it, "to thrust a bodkin through youre toong, and a knife through youre arme — a pitiful sighte — without hurte or danger." The apparent inability of the sixteenth-century mind to fathom the simple solutions to these "tricks," and to suspect, for example, that the blade of the bodkin slid back into its handle — may be attributed to the limited knowledge in that era of things mechanical. Later, when more men studied science and mechanical principles, these early novelties quite properly fell into disuse.

Yet certain primitive efforts, like the "Cups and Balls," represent good effective magic still performed today. Most, however, have either been replaced by something better, or have been so altered and improved as to make their ancestral line difficult to trace.

One trick, popular ages ago, but no longer performed, involved a small wooden doll, a miniature cape, and an "invisible" coin. Judging from early writings, this ancient trick, known originally as "Bonus Genus" and later as "The Little Messenger," was a favorite with magicians and their audiences. It was a good trick and I touch on it here, not only because it illustrates the



## THE OLD. OLD TRICKS

type of magic performed by the first magicians but also because it serves to introduce some of the basic principles of magic.

To "see" the trick just as it was performed, suppose we roll back the years to an era long gone and join a knot of spectators watching an open-air magic show. The place may be a London street corner, a crowded fair, or a Parisian park.

The magician, with sleeves rolled back, displays a small wooden doll, about six inches in height. Watch closely. He's going to make the doll disappear right before your eyes, and the odds are that you won't have the faintest notion as to how he does it.

After introducing the doll as a magic messenger possessing the mystical ability to whisk itself, instantly and invisibly, to any designated spot on earth, the magician taps it sharply to prove that it is solid throughout. Next he shows a small cape which fits over the doll's head and hangs down below its feet leaving only the head in view, protruding from the neck of the cape. (See Figure 4.)

The magician declares that the messenger's destination must be decided. In this bit of whimsy, the magician consults the children in the group. After some humorous byplay, it is decided that the messenger will be sent to a far-off mysterious land for the purpose of transmitting some nonsensical message.

Now, the magic moment has arrived. The magician taps the doll's head, and the children, as instructed, shout "Go!" Nothing happens! The embarrassed magician, after pretending to consult with the doll, apologizes to the onlookers and explains that he forgot to furnish the messenger with travel expenses.

"He doesn't use ordinary money," the magician tells his audience. "He only uses special invisible money. Luckily," he adds, "I have some of these coins here in my pocket."

After pretending to tuck one of these invisible coins into the messenger's cape, the magician announces that everything is ready. Again he taps the doll's head, and again the children shout "Go!" And this time the messenger *does* leave. There's no doubt about this point — the doll has actually disappeared! The magician flips the empty cape inside out and rolls it into a ball. The solid six-inch doll everyone was watching so closely has, apparently, dissolved into nothingness. The magician's hands are empty, the cape is empty. Where, then, did the messenger go?

To begin with, what fooled everyone was the apparent disappearance of a small wooden doll — in full view one second, gone the next. But is that what actually happened? Not exactly.

The presence of the doll, the complete doll, was assumed by the watchers, but in reality only its *head* was in sight at the time of the "vanish." Suppose, for the moment, that the doll didn't have a body at that point; let's say the doll's body had been detached from its head early in the trick, and that the magician somehow had managed secretly to steal it away. This would present an entirely different problem, wouldn't it? The cape could have a small secret pocket on the inside and when the magician tapped the head he would merely have to make sure that it dropped into this secret pocket. The cape would look empty and could be turned inside out and rolled into a ball. No one would give it a second thought because, you see, everyone was

thinking in terms of a six-inch doll — not just a small round head.

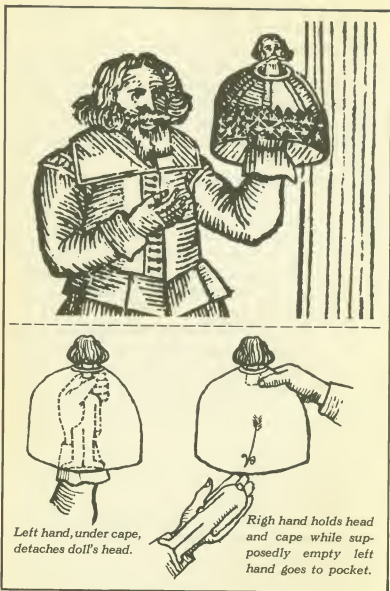
This, of course, is exactly what happened. The magician *did* make off with the doll's body without the audience's seeing it, and the doll's head was dropped into a secret inside pocket. But how could the magician have spirited away the doll's body without anyone's knowledge? Did it go up his sleeve? Was the hand quicker than the eye?

Use of the sleeves is ruled out since they were rolled back at the start of the trick. As to the hand's being quicker than the eye — it just isn't. The hands of the nimblest magician travel at snail's pace when measured against speeds the eye can readily detect. No, the little headless messenger was disposed of simply and openly. No one paid much attention because the magician's actions appeared *natural*.

The so-called invisible coin is the clue. The messenger's body was concealed ("palmed") in the magician's hand when he reached into his pocket to obtain the coin. When the magician withdrew his hand, supposedly holding an invisible coin, he had left the body of the doll behind — safely out of sight.

And why did this brazen action go unnoticed? First, the spectator didn't realize that the body was detachable. In short, there was advance *preparation* of which the viewers were unaware. For many a trick, preparation gives the magician a long head start over his audience. Secondly, by palming the doll's body, the magician made an unusual act appear innocent and natural. The hand that went to the pocket looked empty although, of course, the magician did not call attention to this point. Lastly, the move to the pocket,

(Figure 4)



"The Little Messenger." Above, a woodcut showing an ancient performance of the trick. Below, the workings of the trick as seen from the back.

which might have been received with a high degree of suspicion despite the apparent emptiness of the hand, was cloaked in innocence when the magician announced that the pocket contained an invisible coin needed for the messenger's trip. With that declaration, the magician prepared the audience to accept the thrust of his hand into the pocket as sort of an incidental part of the fanciful story he was weaving. If he had neglected to prepare the way for what was to follow, and had simply plunged his hand into his pocket without first giving his viewers a reason for doing so, alarm bells would have clanged loudly in their minds and most, if not all, of the mystery surrounding the trick would, like the messenger himself, have vanished.

Simple? Obvious? Simple, perhaps — most tricks are — but certainly not obvious. For in this explanation, one important ingredient is missing: the ability of a skilled magician to *misdirect* the attention of his audience so that they see and remember only those things he *wants* them to see and remember. In the hands of a clever, glib performer, "The Little Messenger" was both baffling and entertaining. The English author Charles Dickens, an ardent amateur magician, never failed to include this trick in his elaborate and carefully rehearsed performances of magic. Years after the death of the novelist, his daughter Mamie, in *My Father as I Recall Him* singled out this trick with the doll and mentioned that ". . . it was a particular favorite and was eagerly awaited and welcomed."

I have taken time to dust off and describe this antique museum piece mainly because it introduces some elemental principles of magic. My hope is that in describing the trick from the viewpoints of both the spectator and the magician, I have given the reader a glimpse,

however faint and fleeting, of the fascination magic offers to those who perform it. The need — openly, but indetectably — to steal away the doll's body illustrates the type of problem continually confronting magicians. In a sort of visual battle of wits, there is a unique excitement in meeting such challenges head on and successfully disposing of them — the excitement experienced by a poker player when his bluff works. And unlike losers in a card game, magicians' audiences delight in being outsmarted.

Now to resume the story of what happened in magic after Reginald Scott's *Discoverie of Witchcraft*. In the latter part of the eighteenth century, magic slowly began to develop a recognizable — if vague — form. At that time it was given an assist from the sidelines, so to speak, by an Italian adventurer named Giuseppe Balsamo. This remarkable man, though not actually a conjurer, succeeded in making magic a fashionable topic at all levels of European society. Born in Palermo, Italy, about 1743, Balsamo, after acquiring a meager education, a burning interest in all types of get-rich-quick schemes, and a thoroughly bad reputation — left his native city. He embarked on an incredible career destined to establish him as one of history's outstanding frauds. Like many another quack and charlatan of that era, Balsamo was attracted to the pseudoscience of alchemy — that tantalizing search for a philosopher's stone that would have the power to change base metals to gold, and the water of life (*elixir vitae*) that, if it couldn't extend life indefinitely, could at least postpone death for a few centuries.

While learning the jargon of the alchemists, and creating some of his own as he went along, Balsamo gave

himself the title of count and changed his name to Cagliostro. As the Count Alessandro di Cagliostro he wooed and wed a lovely young lady, and shared his title with her. His "countess" quickly proved herself a capable and valuable partner in the count's highly questionable and highly profitable enterprises. Cagliostro soon discovered, if he didn't know it all along, that the gold to be made from alchemy was not in the laboratory, but in the pockets of the gullible — and these he proceeded to empty at an astonishing rate. The sale of elixirs, with their promise of a prolonged life, became his primary source of income, although fees for healing the sick, correcting deformities, predicting the future, and communicating with the dead all contributed to what eventually became a vast fortune.

Cagliostro's complete lack of principles, his eloquent and dynamic personality, a beautiful, charming, clever wife, and the ignorance of the times combined to establish his reputation throughout Europe as a great healer and mystic. The streets outside the fashionable hotels at which he stopped were invariably jammed with the aged, the sick, the deformed — all seeking his "miraculous" cures.

It was too good to last. Eventually he became embroiled in a stranger-than-fiction swindle involving a missing diamond necklace and no less a person than Marie Antoinette. Though judged innocent of any wrongdoing in the necklace incident, it was made clear to Cagliostro that his welcome in France, if not actually worn out, had reached the point where it was dangerously thin. He quickly complied with the suggestion that he leave the country and, eventually, he returned to Italy. As it turned out, this was a fatal blun-

der. The Roman Inquisition came to the conclusion that there was more sorcery than science behind Cagliostro's alleged powers and, after reversing an original sentence of death, condemned him to life imprisonment. Broken in health and spirit, he died five years thereafter, in 1795.

Despite Cagliostro's personal reputation as a fraud, the image that Europe retained of him — one of great wealth and prominence achieved by a dealer in things magical — stirred an interest in magic on a level, and to an extent, not previously achieved. The respect Cagliostro had inspired helped to smooth the way for magicians to come.

Not all eighteenth-century magic, however, was of the black variety practiced by Cagliostro. In the latter half of the century another Italian, Joseph Pinetti, made his way around the capitals of Europe with a highly successful, entertaining, and skillful exhibition of conjuring. By this time, magicians, good, fair and otherwise, began to appear throughout the Continent. For the most part, these unsophisticated magic shows fell short of winning enthusiastic public acceptance. Too often the tricks were childishly simple, the performers' costumes outdated, and the apparatus both suspicious and cumbersome. The link with the nonsense and the notions of the past was still strong — and so it remained until early in the nineteenth century when the first authentic genius in the history of magic came on the scene.

Born in France in 1805, Jean-Eugene Robert, though fascinated by magic from early childhood, did not adopt it as a profession until after he had established himself as a wizard at mechanics. As a master

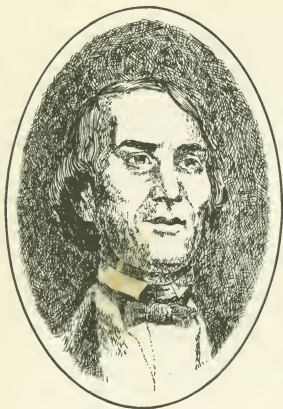


## THE OLD, OLD TRICKS

craftsman, he developed superb artistry, ingenuity, and an attention to detail that proved invaluable when he eventually settled on magic as a career. Under the stage name of Robert-Houdin (formed by tacking his wife's maiden name onto his own), he modernized the magic of his day by improving some tricks, discarding others, and creating many of his own. Particularly critical of the suspiciously bulky apparatus used by most of his contemporaries, Robert-Houdin stressed simplicity and developed a homelike drawing-room atmosphere at his performances. His role was that of a gentleman of refinement and taste entertaining his equals, as opposed to that of a trickster parading an assortment of curious stunts before a crowd. "The magician," he stressed, "is an actor playing the part of a magician" — an axiom adopted and practiced by every successful magician to follow.

Ever mindful of scientific advances in the world about him, he seized on any new discovery which might be used to bolster his presentations. In one trick where his young son apparently defied gravity by reclining in midair,\* Robert-Houdin added a scientific touch to an already baffling illusion by suggesting that the then newly discovered and widely discussed anesthetic, ether, was responsible for offsetting the customary pull of gravity. To provide realism, a backstage assistant would pour a small amount of ether on a heated pan and the resulting fumes, as they drifted through the hall, added credence to Robert-Houdin's imaginative explanation. Little touches like this stimulated public interest and comment, and resulted in crowded houses wherever he appeared.

\* See page 82.



ROBERT-HOUDIN

Robert-Houdin also used an electric magnet in one of his tricks. The public of his day knew of magnets, of course, but with an understanding of electricity yet in its infancy, few people were aware that powerful magnets could be created electrically, and could be switched on and off. Capitalizing on this little-known fact, Robert-Houdin developed his "Light and Heavy Chest." In this trick a small, obviously lightweight, chest is placed on the stage and a robust member of the audience is asked to lift it. No problem. A few hypnotic passes by the magician, however, and this same spectator is unable to budge the same chest which, a moment before, he hoisted with such ease. A small child now trots onto the stage and, effortlessly, lifts the chest. Again our now weakened Samson tries and fails — and so on.

The secret, as I have already indicated, is in the use of a powerful electric magnet concealed beneath the stage. A metal lining in the supposedly all-wooden chest is attracted to this magnet, and by switching the current on and off, the magician achieves the desired result: the chest is either light as a mouse or heavy as an elephant. Though the trick was good for an amusing interlude, it certainly was not one of Robert-Houdin's best. Nevertheless it turned out to be his most famous because of the important role it played in smoothing over a serious international incident.

For a number of years the French government had been receiving disturbing reports of growing resentment toward Frenchmen by Arab tribes of North Africa, resentment stirred up and frequently fanned to the heat of open rebellion by the influential and awe-inspiring North African Marabouts (sorcerers sup-

posedly possessing supernatural powers). The French leaders cast about for some way to shatter the reputations of these alleged sorcerers, some way to make the Arabs realize that the so-called power of the Marabouts was nothing more than a few simple magic tricks helped out by the ready superstition of the natives. What better way to do this, it was finally decided, than to expose the North African natives to the seemingly miraculous powers of the most incredible Frenchman of them all — Robert-Houdin. Arrangements were made for the famous magician to give a performance before the leading Arab chieftains and Marabouts and, on September 10, 1856, Robert-Houdin set sail for Algeria with a carefully selected repertoire of tricks, among which was the trick with the chest. What followed is one of the most frequently told stories in the realm of magic. Robert-Houdin succeeded admirably in converting the Arabs' belligerence to awed respect, and the threat of an uprising disappeared.

Here is his own account of the incident, extracted from his *Memoirs*. After describing a series of tricks with which he succeeded in confusing his native audience — such tricks as producing a sizable stack of cannonballs from an "empty" hat, and pouring seemingly endless quantities of hot coffee from a small container — Robert-Houdin continues:

But it was not enough to amuse my spectators; I must also, in order to fulfill the object of my mission, startle and even terrify them by the display of a supernatural power.

My arrangements had all been made for this purpose, and I had reserved for the end of my performances three tricks, which must complete my reputation as a sorcerer.

Many of my readers will remember having seen at my

## THE OLD, OLD TRICKS

performances a small but solidly built box, which, being handed to the spectators, becomes heavy or light at my order; a child might raise it with ease, and yet the most powerful man could not move it from its place.

I advanced, with my box in my hand, to the center of the "practicable," communicating from the stage to the pit; then, addressing the Arabs, I said to them:

"From what you have witnessed, you will attribute a supernatural power to me, and you are right. I will give you a new proof of my marvelous authority, by showing that I can deprive the most powerful man of his strength, and restore it at my will. Any one who thinks himself strong enough to try the experiment may draw near me." (I spoke slowly, in order to give the interpreter time to translate my words.)

An Arab of middle height, but well built and muscular, as many of the Arabs are, came to my side with sufficient assurance.

"Are you very strong?" I said to him, measuring him from head to foot.

"Oh yes!" he replied, carelessly.

"Are you sure you will always remain so?"

"Quite sure."

"You are mistaken, for in an instant I will rob you of your strength, and you shall become as a little child."

The Arab smiled disdainfully, as a sign of his incredulity.

"Stay," I continued. "Lift up this box."

The Arab stooped, lifted up the box, and said to me, coldly, "Is this all?"

"Wait ——!" I replied.

Then, with all possible gravity, I made an imposing gesture, and solemnly pronounced the words:

"Behold! You are weaker than a woman; now try to lift the box."

The Hercules, quite cool as to my conjuration, seized the box again by the handle, and gave it a violent tug, but this time the box resisted, and in spite of his most vigorous attacks, would not budge an inch.

The Arab vainly expended on this unlucky box a strength

which would have raised an enormous weight, until, at length, exhausted, panting, and red with anger, he stopped, became thoughtful, and began to comprehend the influences of magic.

He was on the point of withdrawing; but that would be allowing his weakness, and conceding that he, hitherto respected for his vigor, had become as a little child. This thought rendered him almost mad.

Deriving fresh strength from the encouragements his friends offered him by word and deed, he turned a glance round them, which seemed to say: "You will see what a son of the desert can do."

He bent once again over the box: his nervous hands twined around the handle, and his legs, placed on either side like two bronze columns, served as a support for the final effort.

But wonder of wonders! This Hercules, a moment since so strong and proud, now bows his head; his arms, riveted to the box, undergo a violent muscular contraction: his legs give way, and he falls on his knees with a yell of agony!

An electric shock, produced by an inductive apparatus, had been passed, on a signal from me, from the further end of the stage into the handle of the box. Hence the contortions of the poor Arab!

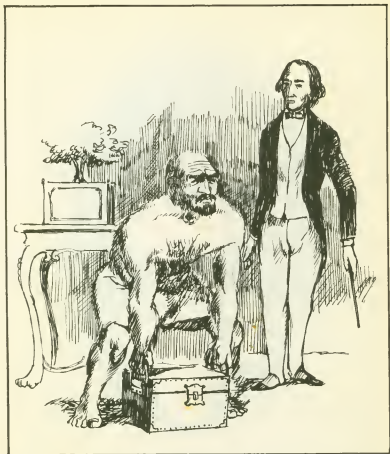
It would have been cruelty to prolong this scene.

I gave a second signal, and the electric current was immediately intercepted. My athlete, disengaged from his terrible bondage, raised his hands over his head.

"Allah! Allah!" he exclaimed, full of terror; then wrapping himself up quickly in the folds of his burnous, as if to hide his disgrace, he rushed through the ranks of the spectators and gained the front entrance.

With the exception of my stage boxes and the privileged spectators, who appeared to take great pleasure in this great experiment, my audience had become grave and silent, and I heard the words "Shaitan!" "Djenoum!" passing in a murmur round the circle of credulous men, who, while gazing on me, seemed astonished that I possessed none of the physical qualities attributed to the angel of darkness."

THE OLD, OLD TRICKS



Robert-Houdin the famous French magician performing the "Light and Heavy Chest" before the Marabouts of North Africa.

Robert-Houdin — conjurer, actor, ambassador, author, scientist, and inventor — died in France in 1871, but not before his remarkable talents had earned for him the title by which he is known today: "The Father of Modern Magic."



HERRMANN  
THE GREAT



# THE MAGICIAN'S IMAGE

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**A**sks an artist to picture a typical magician and, invariably, he will produce a sketch of a slim, dark-haired individual in a full-dress suit, sporting a moustache and Vandyke beard. Ask the artist to depict this "typical" magician performing a trick, and it's a safe bet that he will show a rabbit being plucked from a shiny black top hat.

Whether he is aware of it or not, the artist will have produced a likeness of Alexander Herrmann—or "Herrmann the Great," as admiring critics called him.

Born in Paris in 1844, Alexander Herrmann started out as an assistant in a highly successful magic show conducted by his older brother, Carl. Impressed by his brother's success, Alexander eventually branched out on his own and soon proved to be what show people call a "natural." He looked, acted, and lived the part of a modern Merlin. Though large stage illusions formed a vital part of his performances, his real enjoyment and talent lay in sleight of hand, an art at which, from all accounts, he was a true master.

Of all the outstanding magicians, it seems that he alone fitted the public's idea of a genuine master of mystery. With an eye to Robert-Houdin and an ear to Shakespeare, he acted the role of a magician with the whole world as his stage. He never stopped performing. Rarely could youngsters pass him on the street without having the great man pluck gold coins from behind their ears or eggs from their pockets. And if these pop-eyed children went about proclaiming the marvelous powers of the Great Herrmann, he certainly had no objection.

At heart a practical joker, Herrmann seldom missed an opportunity to use his skill to stir up a bit of fun. "I'm sorry, sir," a streetcar conductor would say, "you only gave me a penny — the fare is a nickel." In mock seriousness Herrmann would examine the coin closely. "You need spectacles, my good man," he would say loudly enough for the other passengers to hear. "That's a nickel if I ever saw one." Then he would press the coin back into the conductor's palm. The protest from the now bristling conductor would be short-lived when, on opening his hand, he would find that the penny had been miraculously transformed into a five-cent piece. Such episodes usually ended with the victim receiving a free pass to the theater, everyone within earshot learning that Herrmann the Great was in town, and a write-up of the incident in the local newspaper.

Occasionally, his harmless and spontaneous practical jokes would misfire and Herrmann would emerge as the victim of one of his own schemes. A great storyteller, he would delight in relating such incidents. There was, for example, the evening when the famous humorist Bill Nye quietly outwitted him at dinner. Herrmann,

making sure that he had the waitress' attention, peered intently into Nye's salad. "My, what a beautiful diamond," the magician remarked and, reaching across the table, he produced a dazzling ring, previously palmed, from behind a lettuce leaf. "Really, Bill," he said, studying the ring, "you shouldn't leave your valuables lying about." Expressionless, Nye took the ring from Herrmann and handed it to the waitress, remarking, "He's right, young lady, since I'd only lose it, suppose you keep it." Dumbfounded, Herrmann watched as Nye calmly returned to his meal, and the waitress, now wearing an obviously expensive ring, tripped off to the kitchen to rave to her co-workers about the wonderfully generous Mr. Nye.

Another of Herrmann's favorite stories was about his experience in Mexico where, after weeks of elaborate advance publicity, he was hissed and hooted off the stage the night of his first performance in that country. The reason, as Herrmann soon discovered, lay in the gaudy posters scattered about town to herald the arrival of his show. On these advance announcements, the artist had pictured one of Herrmann's feature tricks in which the magician apparently cuts off and replaces the head of an assistant, who, none the worse for the ordeal, smiles and walks off the stage. In illustrating this trick on the posters, the overimaginative artist added a few gory touches of his own. Herrmann was pictured with sleeves rolled back, brandishing a large and bloody knife in one hand while, in the other, he clutched the hair of a severed head from whose neck gushed quantities of rich red blood. Completing the horror, the headless corpse in the background reclined on a blood-soaked couch.

American and European audiences, even in those days, were more or less conditioned to advertising exaggeration, but the less sophisticated Mexicans took these posters at face value and eagerly awaited the bloody spectacle. At the first performance, the theater was jammed. The mood of the crowd was not unlike that of the mobs in the French Revolution pushing and shoving in front of the guillotine as they awaited the arrival of the aristocrats. Finally, Herrmann began the decapitation trick and a tomblike silence settled over the audience. But when the trick was completed without the shedding of a single drop of the promised blood, there was a near riot. The audience had been cheated!

After this performance, Herrmann righted matters by quickly preparing new and less exciting posters, and he succeeded, as he did everywhere, in winning over those who came to watch him perform. So stirring was his success, in fact, that the Mexican government assigned him a guard of honor as he traveled from town to town, a formality usually reserved for visiting royalty.

By the time of Herrmann's death in 1896, magic had long since been established as a legitimate and important medium of entertainment. Though outstanding, Herrmann was not, most certainly, the only famous conjurer of his time. The chronicles of magic ring with the accomplishments of a legion of magicians at the turn of the century. Names like Bautier de Kolta, Robert Heller, and John Nevil Maskelyne, to select just a few, are as familiar to students of magic as notes of the scale are to a musician.

By 1900, magic had settled into a comfortable and profitable niche. Modernized by Robert-Houdin and

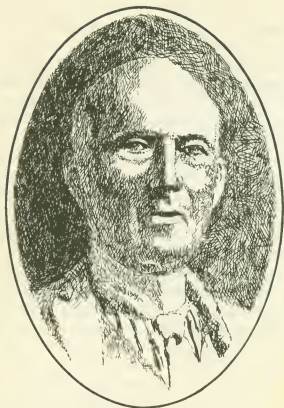
popularized by personable and dynamic individuals like Herrmann — everything seemed fine. And then, with the explosive force of a bomb, a book called *Modern Magic* appeared in England and rocked the world of the professional magician.

In its more than five hundred closely printed and well-illustrated pages, the majority of the cherished secrets of the magicians of the day were explained with beautiful simplicity and clarity for all the world to read and understand. To make matters considerably worse, the book was even serialized in — of all places — a popular magazine for boys. This, to most magicians, was utter betrayal. The cloak of secrecy on which their very existence depended had been ripped away. All was lost — or so they believed at the time. Who could do such a thing — and why?

The author of *Modern Magic* was an Oxford-educated London barrister named Angelo Lewis. Whether from fear of violence at the hands of angry magicians, or to avoid having his side activities interfere with his legal practice, Lewis adopted the pen name of "Professor Hoffmann."

An enthusiastic amateur magician, Lewis had become disturbed at the snail-like progress of his beloved magic, as well as a certain sameness in the performances he witnessed. There just wasn't enough variety or new ideas to suit him, so he decided to stir things up a bit to force magicians out of the rut into which he believed they had slipped. And if this could be accomplished only by exposing the secrets behind their oft-repeated tricks — too bad, but it had to be done.

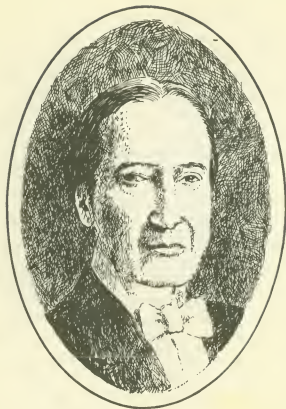
As it turned out, Lewis did accomplish what he set out to do, but not, perhaps, exactly in the manner he



KELLAR

had anticipated. New ideas did come along, but not so much from the closely knit group of professionals who had held the spread of knowledge in check, as from the droves of newcomers attracted to magic as a result of Lewis' book. *Modern Magic* became the bible for all would-be magicians and hobbyists. As it ran through its thirteen or more editions, its gospel was spread far and wide and converted many who might otherwise have had little more than a passing interest in performing tricks. Increased interest produced a corresponding increase in the demand for information. More books appeared, clubs were formed, and regularly scheduled magic magazines came into being. It was not long before the bulk of the material in *Modern Magic* had been cast aside in favor of newer, brighter, more subtle tricks.

In the meantime, an American by the name of Harry Kellar, a name treated with great respect by magical historians, ascended the throne left vacant when Herrmann died. Replacing Herrmann, no easy job, was doubly difficult for Kellar due to the sharp contrast between his appearance and the image of a modern wizard created by Herrmann. The somewhat homely and completely bald Kellar did not look the part of the world's foremost exponent of the art of magic. Not, that is, until he started to perform. "I can do any kind of magic except make hair grow on my head," he would announce with a smile, and would then proceed to captivate his audience with a performance of magic which, according to reports in the magic journals, has seldom been equaled for pure audience enjoyment. Like Herrmann, Kellar was a master at sleight of hand, and a superb showman. He was equally at home with small manipulative tricks and massive stage illusions. One



THURSTON



#### THE MAGICIAN'S IMAGE

minute he would be performing a comical trick using no equipment other than a short length of clothesline, and the next, a hushed audience would watch as he caused a young lady to float in midair.

After achieving world fame and more than ample financial security, Kellar, in 1907, chose a young American magician, Howard Thurston, to succeed him, and after forty-five years in various branches of show business went into a well-earned retirement.

If the pattern of the past was to hold for the future, it would seem that Kellar's successor would be accepted as the leading magician of the day. In some respects this happened. Thurston, an excellent performer and showman, possessed a natural awareness of what modern audiences enjoy. One season he would feature a trick in which a ferocious lion was magically transformed into a beautiful young lady; the following year would see the vanish of an automobile together with all its occupants. His performances were spectacular — and profitable. Magic had become big business. Addressing a meeting of the Society of American Magicians in the early 1920's, Thurston announced that his show, during the preceding four seasons, had earned in excess of a million dollars. And this in the low-salaried, tax-free days of that era! Magic had come a long, long way from the time of the street-corner jugglers.


Despite a highly successful career, Thurston was destined to be dwarfed in the public eye by a true giant of show business — an incredibly ambitious, energetic, and talented individual who was to soar to heights rarely achieved in the world of entertainment. His name: Harry Houdini.



HOUDINI

# HOUDINI— AND AFTER

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 Born in 1874, Houdini, the son of a Budapest rabbi, began life as Ehrich Weiss. Shortly thereafter, his family sailed for the United States, settling first in Wisconsin and later, when Ehrich was fifteen years old, on the East Side of New York City. Somewhere along the way young Ehrich developed an intense interest in magic. After mastering a few tricks taught him by a friend, he began to hunt for others, a quest that took him to a secondhand bookstore where he spied an English translation of Robert-Houdin's memoirs. The famous French magician's account of his life and adventures became Ehrich's passport to a whole new world, a sparkling world of applause and footlights. The boy was entranced. This would be *his* world. By comparison everything else seemed drab and colorless. Like Robert-Houdin he would be a great magician — the *greatest*, in fact.

In searching about for a stage name, Ehrich was told by a friend that in French, the letter *i*, added to the

end of a word or a name, means "like." Perfect. Ehrich Weiss wanted to be like his newly found idol, so he would simply add an *i* to Houdin and become — Houdini. And since Harry Kellar was then the reigning monarch of magic, the best new first name would be Harry.

And so, Ehrich Weiss, now Harry Houdini, dreamed his dreams of fame and fortune — dreams, it is interesting to note, that not only came true, but were actually exceeded by reality. For even in the ambitious wanderings of the boy's imagination, he could not, certainly, have envisioned a day when the name Houdini would, literally, be a part of the English language — a sort of synonym for anything difficult or impossible. Nor could he have imagined that his fame would spread, grow, and outlive him — so that now, decades after his death, his name would be known to more people than when he was a living, performing entertainer.

Between the dreams and their realization, however, lay many dreary years of hunger, cold cheap saloons, dime museums, carnivals, small-time vaudeville houses, and layoffs.

Then one afternoon in Minneapolis a well-known theatrical figure, Martin Beck, dropped in to see Houdini's act. Beck, who was on the lookout for fresh vaudeville talent, watched perfunctorily as Houdini went through a variety of standard unspectacular tricks. Midway in the act, however, Beck's keen theatrical sense snapped to attention. Houdini was holding aloft a pair of regulation handcuffs from which he had announced his intention to escape. Nothing new in this; Beck had seen any number of sideshow magicians slip out of phony handcuffs. No, it was the challenge Hou-

#### HOUDINI — AND AFTER

dini hurled at his audience — and the reaction of the audience — that interested him.

"If you think these handcuffs are faked," said Houdini, "bring your own. Right here on this stage you can snap them on my wrists — and I'll escape."

Then, fixing his audience with the intense stare characteristic of his performance, he added — slowly, dramatically, and with utmost conviction — "I defy anyone, anywhere, to confine me in such manner that I cannot free myself." Beck noted that the audience, which up to this point had been only mildly interested in Houdini's tricks, was now silent, attentive, visibly impressed.



His own interest quickening, Beck watched as Houdini quickly and effortlessly liberated himself from the handcuffs and ended his act with his feature item "Metamorphosis," an "escape" trick in which, after having his hands tied behind his back, Houdini was placed in a large cloth sack the mouth of which, in turn, was also securely tied. Next he was lifted into a trunk that was not only locked, but was tied round and round with a long, heavy rope. Beck and the audience watched intently as Houdini's wife drew a curtain in front of the roped trunk, and bunched it under her chin, leaving only her head in sight.

"Three seconds! Count them!" she announced. "One, two." Before finishing the count, she ducked her head behind the curtain and, as the audience gasped, Houdini's instantly took its place.

"Three!" he shouted, finishing the count and flinging open the curtain to reveal the still securely tied trunk.

His attractive young wife, however, was nowhere to be seen! The rope encircling the trunk was quickly untied, the locks opened, the bag unfastened — and, inside, her hands tied behind her, was the missing girl. In three seconds, the two had changed places! The applause was thundering.

As Beck's guests at dinner that evening, the Houdinis were alternately dismayed and delighted as he expressed his opinion of their act: dismayed because he was unimpressed by Houdini's magic, delighted at his enthusiasm regarding Houdini's escapes. By the time dessert had arrived, Beck had convinced Houdini that he should put magic aside and concentrate on escapes. Giving up his beloved magic was a bitter pill for Houdini to swallow, but it was sweetened considerably by

Beck's offer of steady work at a starting salary of sixty dollars a week.

Now forever behind him were the beer halls, the dime museums, and the dinners of coffee and doughnuts. Houdini had been shown the road to travel and he was to go racing down it at a pace and to a distance that would astound everyone, including the one who had pointed the way. For even theatrically wise Martin Beck failed to realize that the determined young man sitting opposite him that night in a Minneapolis restaurant had within him the makings of a super showman — one whose feats would become legendary.

Houdini's frequent dreams of world fame developed into a permanent obsession. Drawing on his tremendous storehouse of energy and determination, he set out to add every available scrap of information to his already impressive knowledge of locks, shackles, handcuffs, prison cells, vaults, knots — all conceivable methods of confinement by which he might, some day, be challenged.

Before anything else, however, he had to live down his reputation as a small-time vaudeville magician. Coupled with his new outlook, he must somehow get a fresh start. The more he thought about it, the more the solution seemed apparent: he would go to Europe. There his escape act would be new and fresh — they'd love him! So the Houdinis took themselves off to England, but if the English fell in love with him, they hid their feelings well. His reception was little short of frigid.

London booking agents resented Houdini's boastful, brash manner and his "ridiculous" challenges. After weeks of frustration he finally met a theater manager

who was not only willing to give him a week's trial, but actually seemed to consider the possibility that Houdini's challenges were backed by something more substantial than hot air.

"How about the cuffs down at Scotland Yard? Can you get out of those?" the manager asked.

"Of course," Houdini replied, puzzled that anyone should question his ability.

"Come on, then." The manager reached for his hat. "If you can slip out of those, you'll get all the work you can handle in this town."

At first, the superintendent of Scotland Yard would have none of it. The dignity and reputation of the world's foremost law enforcement agency did not lend itself to publicity stunts. Houdini's cockiness, however, rankled the superintendent who finally hustled him out into the corridor.

"Put your arms around that." The superintendent pointed to one of the marble pillars.

Houdini embraced the pillar and a pair of official handcuffs were snapped on his wrists.

The now smiling official took Houdini's companion by the arm. "Come back to my office," he said. "I'll release him in about an hour, after the swelling leaves his head."

But Houdini had done his homework well. In his extensive study of handcuffs, the model used by Scotland Yard had come under his scrutiny and he had detected a flaw in the mechanism overlooked by their designer, a flaw that enabled him to release himself from the supposedly foolproof cuffs as easily as he would slip off a pair of gloves. He was free the second the superintendent turned his back. Catching up and



falling in step with the police official he said quietly, "If you're going back to the office, I'll go with you." Smiling, he handed the handcuffs back.

The superintendent's astonishment was, as the story got out, duplicated throughout England, then the rest of the Continent, and finally in America. With the suddenness of a handcuff's click, Houdini was catapulted into the glaring spotlight of a big-time attraction. Offers poured in. His original one-week engagement was extended to six months and then ended only because the now famous escape king had other engagements to fill, other countries to conquer. Armed with a sense of publicity often compared to that of the great Barnum, he captured the attention of the world with an apparently endless assortment of sensational escapes.

He was, it seemed, as impossible to hold onto as a shadow. His challengers tried everything: packing cases, straitjackets, prison cells, mailbags, giant milk cans, chains, ropes, handcuffs, leg-irons. Houdini worked his way out of them all. Whether shaking off straitjackets while suspended by his feet from skyscrapers, or wriggling out of chains on river bottoms, he lived up to his boast: nothing on earth could hold him.

Once established as the escape king, Houdini turned his gaze, and a disapproving one it was, on the seamy world of the fake spirit medium. Though pretended communication with the spirit world had been practiced by countless charlatans for equally countless centuries, spiritualism did not develop into an international movement until the middle 1800's. World War I brought about an usurge in the vicious practices of fraudulent mediums who reaped handsome profits from heartbroken parents tricked into believing that contact

could be made with sons lost in battle. And so it continued until the 1920's when an incensed Houdini determined to drag the mediums out of the protective darkness of the séance room into the light of reason and common sense.

While the mediums howled, denounced him as an unbeliever, and howled some more, Houdini raced about exposing their methods, disrupting séances, writing articles, delivering lectures, forming committees, and even petitioning Congress for stricter controls to destroy these merchants in misery.

How well he succeeded is, perhaps, best illustrated in this portion of a 1925 *New York Herald Tribune* editorial:

Those of us belonging to that portion of humanity which does not subscribe to belief in the existence of spooks should be grateful to Houdini, the Handcuff King. This showman with a scientist's devotion to the truth saves us the trouble of having to argue with those who do believe in ghosts, let alone having to give them serious house room in our brains. He deserves some sort of salute.

We can hear Houdini challenging all the spirit mediums in the world to win \$10,000 of his savings by doing something with the aid of ghosts that he cannot do with trickery. So long as Houdini's forfeit is unclaimed we may, with a clear conscience, refuse to waste time on the séance...

Though many tried, the \$10,000 mentioned in the editorial was never collected. Mediums foolish enough to try quickly learned that they were up against a brilliant investigator whose knowledge of trickery was by no means limited to locks and keys. As president of the Society of American Magicians as well as the Magicians Club of London, and possessor of the world's largest

collection of books on magic,\* Houdini's familiarity with ways of accomplishing the seemingly impossible was unsurpassed. Yet even as he demolished one fraud after another, he kept an open mind and continually sought evidence of a genuine link between this and the spirit world. He never found it.

Throughout his professional life, Houdini constantly flirted with injury and death. Fractures, strains, torn muscles, and cuts were commonplace for him. He shrugged them off and, true to his calling, went on with the show. "They paid to see Houdini," he would tell protesting physicians, "and that's whom they're going to see." A sort of superman in the public eye, he carefully preserved this image by hiding all evidence suggesting that he, the Great Houdini, could fall victim to the same human frailties as beset mere mortals. In the end, this vanity was his undoing.

It happened in a Montreal theater as a result of a discussion with a McGill University student on the subject of physical prowess. The student, an amateur boxer, mentioned that circus strongmen allowed spectators to deliver hard punches to their midsections. Could Houdini do the same? Houdini replied that he could. The stunt called for superbly developed stomach muscles which could be so tightened as to form an almost granitehike surface.

The eager student, without waiting for Houdini to get set, delivered a hard blow to the right side. Gasping in pain, Houdini explained to the apologetic youth that he hadn't had time to get ready. He suggested that the student try again. The second blow did no damage since

\*The Houdini collection now occupies a separate room in the Congressional Library at Washington, D. C.

Houdini was prepared, but the effects of the first remained. As the day wore on, the pain increased, and on the second day it became almost unbearable. Stubbornly refusing medical attention, Houdini continued to perform and moved on to Detroit where he attempted to fulfill his schedule. His collapse on stage abruptly halted his final performance. Rushed to a hospital, he was found to be suffering from a ruptured gangrenous appendix. Emergency surgery was followed by an ever-mounting temperature and the man who had strutted the stages of the world with the challenge that nothing could hold him, was now the helpless prisoner of a terrible fever from which, back in 1926, there was no release — no key. He fought back, but it was a battle lost actually before it had begun. Two days dragged by and then, quietly, the fight was over.

If, somewhere, there is a place where the departed "greats" of show business congregate to discuss their earthly exploits, Houdini's final contribution to the legends of showmanship must receive a nod of approval all around. For this man of mystery, this spook chaser, breathed his last on the one day of the year associated with dark doings, with ghosts and goblins. Houdini died on October 31st — Halloween!

At the time of Houdini's death, in 1926, all forms of live entertainment seemed to be sailing along smoothly under sunny skies, but ominous clouds were gathering at the horizon. Motion pictures, the automobile, and the radio were beginning to absorb much of the public's leisure time. The development of sound movies represented further competition. Vaudeville would soon begin to stagger and, with the coming of the bleak de-

pression of the thirties, it would eventually fall.

As vaudeville declined, so did professional magic. True, theater marquees continued to blaze with names like Thurston, Goldin, Blackstone, Hardeen (Houdini's brother), Nicola, Dante — and other famous magicians — but time was running out. Each season saw fewer and fewer American theaters featuring live attractions. An era was ending.

Though illusionists with spectacular full evening shows were best known to the public, they represented but a tiny fraction of the international world of professional magic. For each big-timer there were hundreds of shorter, faster-paced "acts" presided over by magicians who condensed the efforts of a lifetime into a short, and often nearly perfect, exhibition.

Such a performer was T. Nelson Downs who got his start at the beginning of this century when he intrigued audiences by the ease with which he made money — he simply reached out and there it was. Downs began his act with a pair of unquestionably empty hands and proceeded to extract hundreds of shiny silver coins, apparently from nowhere. His act was a miser's dream come true. The real deception, however, was that it was neither easy nor effortless. Nobody, Downs included, could hope to tabulate the painstaking hours he spent perfecting every motion he made while on stage.

To most of us, playing cards represents a quiet game of bridge, poker, or perhaps, solitaire. To a master at sleight of hand like Nate Leipzig, a pack of cards was a lifetime challenge to perform the impossible. Shunning outward displays of skill, Leipzig made it appear that actual miracles were taking place. Greeting the outcome of his tricks with an amazed smile, he seemed to

share the astonishment of his audiences. So natural and effortless were his actions, that he often appeared to be just another spectator.

One of Leipzig's lifetime favorite tricks concerned the strange behavior of the four aces. With a red ace at the top and bottom of the deck, the black aces were slid into the center. A tap on the deck, and the order was mysteriously reversed: the reds were now in the center and the blacks at the top and bottom. Another tap, and all four congregated at the center. A final tap and an assisting spectator verified that the aces had vanished altogether!

Leipzig waved his hand over the indifferent card at the face of the pack and it visibly changed to one of the missing aces. The second and third ace reappeared in the same inexplicable manner. As for the fourth ace, the spectator was invited to count down to any number of his choice, and there it was!

Long after his retirement from the stage, I watched Leipzig perform this ace trick for a group of magicians. "Perfect," one of them commented at the conclusion of the trick. "No," Leipzig said thoughtfully. "It's not. There's still one little point that isn't just right." After performing the trick for forty years, he still wasn't satisfied!

Fred Keating ushered in the era of the suave, fast-talking comedy-magician. Having learned the techniques of his trade from the great Leipzig, Keating developed into what was known as a "smart" entertainer and, for a while, was almost a permanent fixture at that Mecca for all vaudevillians: the Palace Theater in New York City. He became closely identified with a famous trick of a previous era in which a canary bird and cage

vanish from the magician's hands in full view of the audience. Columnists linked Keating with his birdcage just as they do a certain song with a particular singer. It was his trademark. Handsome, clever, glib — the legitimate stage and eventually Hollywood wooed Keating away from magic, but in the end his love of hocus-pocus won out and he returned to the fold.

Joseph Dunninger is somewhat difficult to classify. Though once a vaudeville magician, he later specialized in mental magic, and it is as a mind reader that he became best known. In his nationwide radio and television shows, Dunninger appeared to offer undisputable and dramatic evidence of his ability to fathom thoughts. There was a hue and cry about this for awhile — a belief that Dunninger misled the public into accepting mind reading as a reality instead of a vague, yet to be established, science. These critics seemed to be saying that he did his job too well. In any event, Dunninger went right on raking in substantial fees and gathering up publicity. Like his friend of former days, Harry Houdini, Dunninger had a special genius for keeping his name before the public. No magician other than the Handcuff King can be considered his equal in the area of effective, dramatic showmanship.

So substantial a portion of vaudeville was given over to magic that it is difficult to select a representative few from the hundreds of magicians who trooped about the circuits. Of those generally accepted as outstanding, we must mention Emil Jarrow, a familiar face to thousands of theatergoers who remember him as the funny fellow with the lemon and dollar bills. A vaudeville classic in Jarrow's hands, the lemon trick consisted of making borrowed dollar bills vanish, only to reappear

inside a previously examined lemon. It wasn't until the laughter died down, that Jarrow's audiences realized that they had been exposed to some truly baffling magic.

Ade Duval certainly deserves recognition for having produced an act as beautiful as it was deceptive. Specializing in tricks with silks, the high spot of Duval's act was his apparent ability to change the color of silk handkerchiefs by simply passing them through a cardboard mailing tube. A white handkerchief, on being tucked into the empty tube, emerged from the other end a brilliant red. This was repeated with other handkerchiefs, each one taking on a different color or shade. Next a bunch of smaller handkerchiefs were tucked in. A hearty puff — and these flew out the other end in a brilliantly colored fountain of silk. Naturally Duval sensed that his audience was interested in the tube. Did the silks really change color or were the original white silks still tucked away inside? He put all doubts to rest by slitting the tube end to end and tossing the innocent and empty remains to the audience.

Jack Gwynne, another highly respected vaudeville magician, conducted a smoothly paced, colorful act. Gwynne is respected for his originality as well as his performing ability. As is evident with all creative entertainers, his performances were distinguished by that sparkle that differentiates the originator from his imitator.

"If this be magic, let it be an art." This line of Shakespeare's might well have gone through the mind of a young Welsh soldier named Pitchford as he watched a magician entertain the troops during World War I. At the war's end, the soldier took up the study of magic with particular emphasis on sleight of hand. He had his



sights set on becoming a professional magician, but it took planning and practice—with the emphasis on practice. The finished act did not emerge overnight. Trial, error, and a study of audience reaction prompted adjustments and readjustments. In the beginning he spoke while performing. Somehow, though, his style did not lend itself to words, so he set out to learn pantomime. Similarly, the Welshman's name did not fit his newly developing stage personality; he changed it to one more suggestive of skill with cards and the unexcelled powers of a Houdini; he chose the stage name "Cardini."

The act born of his efforts was a flawless gem, polished to perfection.

The curtains opened to the strains of "Three O'Clock in the Morning." Cardini entered in faultlessly tailored evening clothes, reading what seemed to be an early morning newspaper. A page boy arrived to take his cape and top hat. Without being told, the audience—of which I was a fascinated member—knew that Cardini represented a typical English gentleman (pre-World War II model) returning to his fashionable club after a night on the town. If not tipsy, he was at least a bit fuzzy. Adjusting his monocle, he studied the extended hand of the page. His gaze traveled up the boy's arm and, finally, his thoughts began to clear. He relinquished the newspaper only to find that a wide fan of playing cards had mysteriously appeared in his gloved hand. He shared the boy's astonishment at this unusual development and the two of them watched as the cards slowly trickled from his hand into the outstretched paper held by the boy. Just as the last card fell, however, another fan appeared. The jolt of aston-



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ishment at the unexpected appearance of this second fan of cards dislodged his monocle. This second fan joined the first on the newspaper, but now a third made its appearance.

Cardini removed his hat and gloves, but still the card fans appeared. He ran a handkerchief, rope-wise, between his fingers, but the cards kept coming. And just when everyone felt certain that the atmosphere was completely exhausted of cards—a full pack still in its case popped up at Cardini's fingertips. Without pause, almost as if without thought, as if it were the only natural and right thing to do, the man proceeded into a dazzling display of beautiful and colorful manipulations, at the end of which he squeezed the cards until they became smaller and smaller and finally vanished. When the pack suddenly reappeared, restored to full size, Cardini decided that he had had enough, and he sprang the cards through the air and into the hat held by the now completely confused page boy.

Before the applause had had a chance to die down, Cardini faced a new problem: a cigarette holder had suddenly appeared between his fingers. His interest in this new phenomenon was short-lived because he discovered that his other hand now held a cigarette. The ordinarily simple gesture of placing a cigarette in a holder became a hilarious impossibility. The cigarette insisted on vanishing from the holder and reappearing in the hand. With the perplexed air of one who is rapidly developing an acceptance of the impossible, Cardini shrugged, slid the cigarette into his ear and, sure enough, it reappeared in the holder. After considerable difficulty caused by flaming matches flying out of his hand, he managed to light the cigarette. He took a puff

—and now there were two cigarettes, then three, four, five — there was no end to the lighted cigarettes Cardini found at his fingertips. This production of quantities of lighted cigarettes was a thing of beauty and wonder, particularly to anyone who had some realization of the technical mastery involved. The performer's motions and the background music blended perfectly. Any number of times the audience was convinced that the limit had been reached, that there just couldn't be any more cigarettes around, but each time Cardini interrupted their applause by reaching out and finding still more, all lighted. Not until a large curved meerschau pipe made its appearance did he bow and leave — presumably to settle down in a quiet corner of the club where he could enjoy the pipe and newspaper.

Almost a hundred years before Cardini's heyday, Robert-Houdin, the father of the modern concept of magic, had preached that before anything else a magician must be an actor. Too many years separated the two men for the famous French magician to see Cardini, the performer who, more than any other, fulfilled this requirement to the letter. However, Cardini's ability was not lost on his contemporaries. O. O. McIntyre, syndicated columnist for the Hearst papers and one of the most widely read newspapermen of his day, classified him as "...the most polished performer on the American stage." Interestingly enough, though Cardini's act represented what was probably the finest exhibition of pure sleight of hand ever seen on a stage, the famous columnist went beyond praising his technical ability; he stressed Cardini's artistry as a performer.

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**W**hile I have reported the decline of professional magic, I hasten to correct the impression that it may have vanished altogether. It's just that the seesaw balance between supply and demand resulted in a thinning out of the ranks of entertainers as the outlet for live entertainment diminished. Nevertheless, the professional magician has not been caught up in one of his own vanishing acts; he is still very much around. Private and public clubs, schools, lecture circuits and, of course, television, offer him abundant opportunities. In the United States, a genial gentleman named Milbourne Christopher regularly reaches the public with his large illusion show. It was Christopher who, not long ago, ended a twenty-year magic drought on Broadway by bringing that famous center of the theatrical world its first full evening magic show in as many years. When not hopping about the world to fill engagements, Christopher is a familiar figure in American and British television. On more than one occasion he has starred in

elaborate and well-received television "spectaculars."

Much has been written concerning the death of vaudeville — most of it in the form of a lament. Yet, while the activities of the professional magician diminished, the appeal of magic did not. As one era ends, another begins, and the decline of the professional has been counterbalanced by the rise of the amateur. Years ago, magicians' journals were given over, almost entirely, to the doings of the professional, and to tricks designed for platform or stage. Today, the pendulum has swung to the opposite extreme: the activities of the amateur or semiprofessional have taken over and, since hobbyists can hardly be expected to carry stage illusions around in their back pockets, most of today's tricks are of the small, intimate, closeup variety.

Today's big names in magic also reflect this change. Rank and file members of various magic societies worship at different shrines than did their predecessors of a generation or two ago. The idols of today may not be so well known to the public, but among magicians they are every bit as famous as the widely publicized professionals of the past. The difference is that the men held in esteem today — performers like Dai Vernon, John Scarne, Al Baker, Jean Hugard, Theodore Annemann, U. F. Grant, Tony Slydini, Ed Marlo, Stewart James, Chet Miller, Bill Simon — while capable as performers, gained their fame primarily because of their unusual creative ability, their invention of fresh bafflers.

The efforts of these clever practitioners, and others like them, are circulated throughout the magic world by means of books, pamphlets, magazines, and lecture tours. And whether they present a new trick — or an old trick done a new way — they are assured of an eager and surprisingly large student body made up

from a wide cross section of occupations and from all walks of life.

Salesmen find magic helpful in cracking the ice that all too often builds up around prospective customers. Any number of doctors and dentists relieve tensions in their younger patients by performing a trick or two before that needle is brought out or that drill begins to buzz. Clergymen have been known to dramatize sermons with the aid of magic, and more than one teacher has discovered that a reputation as a performer of tricks works wonders in maintaining student interest.

Magic draws its followers from every field, however improbable. The startled expressions on the faces of customers leaving a certain grocery store in Scotland, for example, weren't caused by increased prices; the proprietor, a soft-spoken gentleman named John Ramsey happened to be one of the world's topflight amateur sleight of hand artists. Similarly, the patients of a New York specialist, Dr. Jacob Daley, may have forgotten their ailments in their efforts to fathom the marvelous tricks their doctor could do with cards, coins, and other small objects whenever a free moment presented itself. Dr. Daley, like grocer Ramsey, was among the best.

Since magicians must also be expected to be actors, it seems reasonable to speculate as to whether actors are ever magicians. They are. A checklist of American actor-magicians past and present includes such names as: Douglas Fairbanks, Sr., Ronald Colman, Joe Cook, Victor Jory, Neil Hamilton, Edmund Lowe, Chester Morris, Harold Lloyd, Orson Welles, Jerry Lewis, John Calvert, Orson Bean, Milton Berle, Johnny Carson, James Stewart, Edgar Bergen.

The strong attraction of magic is demonstrated by

its influence on the professional lives of many of these show people. Edmund Lowe frequently leaned toward the role of a magician in choosing movie scripts. The older Fairbanks delighted in displays of trickery, though clever camera work was needed to bring most of it off — as, for example, his famous magic carpet sequence in *The Thief of Bagdad*. Musical comedy star Joe Cook continually injected magic into his routines, and Harold Lloyd used a magic theme in a number of his comedy classics. Lloyd's interest and knowledge of magic is extensive. In one full-length film, the script called for a hilarious sequence built around a series of stage illusions. Existing illusions were unsuitable, so the famous comedian invented his own.

Orson Welles couldn't resist the temptation to play the infamous Cagliostro in the film *Black Magic* and, in his stage version of *Around the World in Eighty Days*, he took the part of a street magician. Welles, incidentally, is a true magic addict. Magicians' magazines relate how he once performed a startling version of the rising-card trick at a lawn party in England. The idea of revealing a selected card by causing it to rise from the pack is certainly not new, but Welles' version was dramatically unique: the card — he was using one of those oversized "Jumbo" decks — rose out of the deck, out of the garden, in fact it left England completely and disappeared into outer space. Welles — the story goes — had obtained a surplus barrage balloon which, hidden away behind low-hanging clouds, was moored to a nearby tree by means of a thin, virtually invisible, wire. At the proper moment he managed indetectably to attach the end of the wire to the back of the selected card and, by Jove, away it went. I will pass up the



traditional grain of salt on that one, but I absolutely refuse to believe the report that he once hired a skywriter to spell out the name of a selected card.

Authors, almost as often as actors, have found relaxation and pleasure in the practice of magic. Charles Dickens has already been mentioned. To Lewis Carroll, the alter ego of mathematician Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, magic proved to be a more realistic wonderland than the one he had created for his Alice. For historian Hendrick Wilhelm von Loon, it was an ardently pursued lifelong hobby. F. Scott Fitzgerald, when not translating the tempo of the jazz age to words, evidenced an intense interest in magic—as did author, editor, and playwright, Fulton Oursler. The author of *Nightmare Alley*, William Gresham, was an enthusiast up to the end—his last literary effort was a biography of Houdini. Mystery author and editor, Clayton Rawson is well known to magicians for his contributions to their trade journals. His *Death from a Top Hat*, in addition to being an excellent and highly regarded mystery story, offers the reader an authentic behind-the-scenes glimpse of modern-day magic. Bruce Elliott is another author-editor well known to magicians. In addition to his regular nonmagic editorial chores, Elliott has written a string of books on magic for the general public and, for many years, edited a popular and informative magicians' publication, *The Phoenix*.

Until recent years, in the United States, not to have known that Lamont Cranston was a fictional will-o'-the-wisp known as the "Shadow" would have meant that you had somehow managed to avoid the radio, the movies, and the mystery magazines at your local news-dealer. While there is no denying the talents of the

make-believe Mr. Cranston, those of his creator Walter Gibson are, in many respects, even more impressive. To meet the needs of a demanding public, Gibson, year after year, performed the incredible task of turning out reasonably good-sized novels at the rate of one every two weeks. A number of famous magicians, including Thurston and Houdini, made use of his literary talents as well as his encyclopedic knowledge of magic. It is to be doubted whether any individual has written as much on the subject as Gibson. And in his spare time — presumably while his typewriter was cooling — he turned inventor and, as such, has created a multitude of deceptive and subtle tricks.

Sax Rohmer, British novelist and creator of that supreme master of evil, Dr. Fu Manchu, was deeply interested in all things magical; and Ray Bradbury, one of the leading science-fiction writers of today, confesses to being a frustrated magician. In American circles, one of the most highly regarded experts on magic is Martin Gardner, feature writer for the magazine *Scientific American*, staff member of a number of other magazines, author of numerous books on scientific and semi-scientific subjects — and analyst of *Alice in Wonderland*, for which he prepared the *Annotated* edition.

John Scarne, a name not unknown to the public, occupies a unique niche in the Hall of Fame of magic. From early youth Scarne has been torn between two interests: magic, and the methods of the crooked gambler. Scarne's magic — all pure sleight of hand — is a dazzling combination of the two. Avoiding the orthodox tricks of his fellow magicians, and assisted by a brain as nimble as his fingers, he performs tricks that baffle fellow magicians and public alike. The Scarne name is

associated with a number of fascinating stories.

Early in his career, as he told the story to me, he was engaged to entertain a private party in a Manhattan hotel. Cigar smoke, popping corks, clinking glasses, and sideline conversation presented stiff competition to the young entertainer, but he grimly continued. Midway in his performance he offered a pack of cards to be shuffled and placed face down in front of him. Gingerly, he lifted off a portion of the cards to reveal that he had cut to an ace. The guests began to grow quiet. A second shuffle and cut — and again he cut to an ace. The life had suddenly gone out of the party. Inattention gave way to silent concentration as Scarne, at the insistence of one of the guests, performed the stunt again and again. The next day Scarne was again engaged to perform at the hotel, this time before a small group of strangers — plus the persistent guest from the previous evening. No magic this time — Scarne was directed simply to repeat the ace-cutting stunt which he proceeded to do despite the shuffling and examination of the cards by the strangers. As each ace was revealed, the persistent one would look up and smile at the obviously puzzled group. When the cards had gone once around the table, Scarne was handed a check for his services. The name on the check explained the unusual interest in Scarne's ace-cutting ability; it was that of Arnold Rothstein, king of professional gamblers. In Rothstein's world, where fortunes were won or lost on the turn of a card, Scarne's demonstrated ability to cut to aces whenever it pleased him to do so, represented a phenomenon as revolutionary to gamblers as the splitting of the atom was to scientists.

One of Scarne's tricks calls for the services of a spec-

tator whose job it is to retain a sealed envelope in his inside pocket. In demonstrating what is to be done, Scarne with lightning speed usually takes advantage of a split-second opportunity to pick the volunteer's pocket. At the conclusion of the trick, after the volunteer has returned to his seat, Scarne innocently returns the "stolen" article. The amusing climax is the look of utter astonishment on the volunteer's face. Once, on the occasion of a Police Benefit, Scarne's volunteer was a burly individual in the first row. Even before the assisting spectator had begun to tuck the envelope into his pocket, Scarne had whisked away his wallet. The trick over, the volunteer returned to his seat and, in usual fashion, Scarne produced the wallet and smilingly inquired whether it belonged to the volunteer. The roar that followed literally shook the building. Leading all the rest, and helpless with laughter, was the Police Commissioner himself. Unable to continue because of the ceaseless bedlam, Scarne made inquiries and learned that the red-faced owner of the "stolen" wallet was none other than the head of the pickpocket squad.

It was as an expert on the subject of gambling — crooked and otherwise — rather than as a magician that Scarne climbed to national prominence. During World War II, he was chosen to watch over the G.I. dollar. Of the billions of dollars paid to the armed forces, no one could hope to estimate how many millions changed hands in gambling games. What was certain, however, was that a lonely soldier fresh from combat, his pockets filled with accumulated back pay, was easy pickings for the crooked or professional gambler.

This is where Scarne stepped in. Since he could not

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take part in each game, or have a private chat with each G.I., he did the next best thing. He used the pages of the official armed forces magazine *Yank* to reach servicemen everywhere. He shared his knowledge with them; told them when to suspect, and how to recognize, cheating; the games and the type of players to avoid; the correct odds for each game. Through books on cards and dice, he performed the same service for the public and, in 1963, he wrote a monumental and authoritative volume on all aspects of gambling. At various times employed by South American countries to oversee their gambling houses, Scarne has become the visiting gambler's guardian. Under his watchful and knowing eye, players can relax with the assurance that though they may lose their shirts, it won't be because of tricky dealing, crooked roulette wheels, or improper odds.

The world of music is enthusiastically represented in magic by orchestra leader Richard Himber whose boundless energy is, in good part, directed toward keeping magic before the public. When not performing or inventing tricks, Himber is usually rounding up magicians for a show he is producing, or is convincing television producers that this or that phase of magic would make for interesting viewing.

Many members of the sports world have adopted magic as a hobby. Perhaps the most interesting example is Jimmy Grippo, the prizefight manager. Years ago, while he was guiding the destinies of the world's lightweight champion Melio Bettina, Grippo dazzled the nation's sportswriters with his sleight of hand—so much so, that they frequently devoted more space in their columns to the manager than to the champ. Grippo is also a student of hypnotism. Word of this interest got

around and there was speculation as to whether the champion's success was due to his manager's ability to hypnotize opponents. A rival manager decided to take no chances and availed himself of the services of one "Evil Eye" Finkel, a local character reputed to have the ability to put the evil eye on fighters — to "hex" them. Never loath to pass up publicity, Grippo scoffed at Finkel's powers, claiming he could offset them with his hypnotic stare. And so, with the aid of reporters, there were two battles on the night of the fight: one within the ring, the other at ringside where Grippo and Finkel hurled powerful and mysterious forces at each other from opposing corners. Grippo, with some incidental assistance from the champion's powerful punches, won. None of this foolery was taken seriously, of course, and the sportswriters had a field day.

Essentially a form of entertainment, it might seem unlikely that magic would find a place in industry, yet it was a college student's interest in the subject that led to a major revolution in the toy business. The student, A. C. Gilbert, had decided to give lessons in magic as a means of raising money to help pay for his education. While rounding up some simple pieces of equipment to go with the lessons, he was struck with an idea: why not put a half dozen tricks in an attractive box, include written instructions, and sell it to the general public as a "magic set"? The idea hounded him and, after graduation, he half persuaded his skeptical father that the world would buy his lessons in magic — his "sets." Following a slow start, the idea caught on. Eventually Gilbert expanded the original idea to include his famous "Erector" set. After that he added a chemistry set and he didn't stop until there was a "set" to match the hob-

bies and interests of most children. A biographical sketch mentions that as a full-fledged tycoon overseeing a multimillion-dollar business, every so often Gilbert would try his hand at the tricks that gave him his start. It seems understandable that he should have occasionally stroked the goose that laid not one, but a whole row of golden eggs.

In this broad summary of magic, past and present, I hope at least to have established that men of magic are not, as so often pictured, waxed-moustached eccentrics whose secret pockets are filled with rabbits. The difference between a magic enthusiast and his fellow man is hardly a matter of outward appearance. If a difference exists, my guess is that a greater than normal sense of curiosity distinguishes the individual attracted to magic. He is usually a puzzle solver, an early-chapter guesser of murderers in mystery stories and, generally, a prober into what makes things tick, click, or buzz.

All of us, of course, possess these qualities to a certain degree, but with the magically minded individual they are perhaps rooted a bit deeper. And this is why he became interested in magic in the first place. Somewhere along the way he was fooled by a trick. Others accept the fact that they are baffled. After all, tricks are supposed to deceive. But because he delights in figuring things out, he is bothered by his inability to unravel the solution to the trick. A puzzle he can't solve becomes a challenge he can't resist. It stays with him, gnawing away at the back of his mind. Eventually, through reading a book on magic or by striking up an acquaintance with a local magician, he begins to delve into the subject of magic. And now he is no longer nibbling at the

bait — he has swallowed it and he is on the hook.

Up to this point, the book has been concerned with the history and people of magic. Both are fascinating subjects. The rest of this book deals with tricks — tricks that have confused generations of theatergoers as well as simple tricks the reader can easily master and will, I hope, perform. For the true appeal of magic, while it may be partially revealed in its history and personalities, becomes a reality only when you experience the unique satisfaction of baffling some bewildered and uninformed layman.

As you read through these tricks, note the ingenious thinking that makes them possible, the manner in which the magician presents them, the remarkably simple points on which deception hinges. Armed with such information, try one or two of the tricks intended to be performed by the reader. Don't rush matters. Repeat the tricks in private until you are sure of them. Then spring one on an unsuspecting friend. When he greets the outcome of the trick with astonishment, as he surely will if you handle it properly, you will understand the thrill that magic affords its countless thousands of disciples. And if here and there a reader is drawn to pursue the subject further, the author's purpose will have been served.

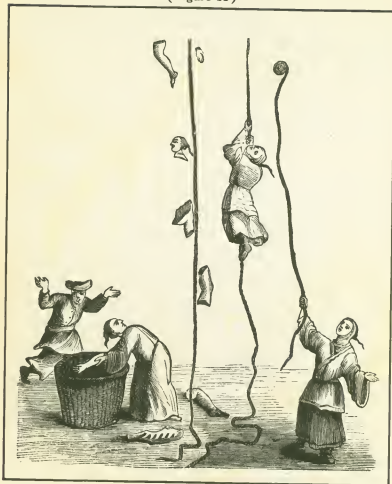
This, then, is why I have explained the tricks that follow — not, most certainly, to satisfy idle curiosity. Exposing the secrets of professional magicians merely for the sake of letting someone know how tricks are done has little to recommend it. Revealing the prosaic and mechanical means by which a delightful and entertaining illusion has been worked out is deplored and opposed by magicians' societies for the same reason that



#### THE NEW CONJURERS

parents had rather not have their children made aware, at too early an age, that Santa Claus is partly made up of a false beard and two plump pillows. In the performance of magic, as in the beneficence of Santa, the effect succeeds only as long as the element of wonder is preserved.

(Figure 13)



*An old Chinese print showing a performance of what later became known as the "Indian Rope Trick."*

## WHAT BECAME OF GRAVITY?

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**W**ho was the first to dream of shaking off the invisible shackles that bind men to earth? It could have been — and probably was — the first person to pause and watch a bird in flight.

Since legends began, the history of man has been liberally sprinkled with accounts of man's dream of rising weightless into the air above him; of people who sought to soar through the sky like gulls; of magic carpets that would float their owners to distant lands with no more effort than it took to point the enchanted broadloom in the right direction.

Perhaps the hardest legend of defying gravity was started back in 1355 by an Arab traveler, ibn-Batuta. He wrote of having seen a Chinese street juggler toss one end of a long strap into the air where it remained upright while a small boy climbed to the top and vanished. Angry because the boy failed to heed his command to return, the juggler, knife in hand, ascended after him, and also vanished. A loud invisible argument

abruptly halted when the boy's dismembered body began to fall to earth, a limb at a time. Finally, the juggler reappeared, slid down the strap, assembled the parts of the scattered figure and, presto, the boy was restored to life, none the worse.

Through the centuries the story was told and retold. Eventually, the strap mentioned in the original version became a rope and the Chinese juggler, a Hindu fakir. As the "Indian Rope Trick," the tale is continually being confirmed or denied. A number of Occidental magicians have toured India with offers of handsome rewards to anyone who could perform the trick, or could produce tangible evidence to prove that the trick had actually been done.

Their efforts were fruitless. In the early 1900's, in advance of a visit to India by the Prince of Wales, a small fortune was guaranteed to the fakir who could perform the trick for the royal visitor. Although the offer was widely circulated, there were no takers.

In this space age, the rope trick has been left behind by speedier, shinier, streamlined legends having to do with flying saucers and the like. There was a time, though, when the fakir — complete with knife, rope, and young friend — was standard fare for the weekend newspaper supplements as well as for the type of magazines which prefer to accept, rather than investigate, the improbable.

Solutions were offered wholesale. The commonsense explanation that there was really nothing to explain was ignored in favor of such uncommon nonsense as "mass hypnotism" and drug-induced "mass hallucinations."

The hypnotism theory was the most popular. This "solution" presupposed that the fakir possessed a knowledge and mastery of hypnotism that could, and should, have earned him an important post in the psychology department of any large university of his choice. The fakir, it seems, simply caused his huge outdoor audience to drop off into a hypnotic trance during which everyone, for some unexplained reason, thought himself to be watching a performance of the Indian rope trick.

The drug theory holds that, prior to the fakir's performance, the onlookers were persuaded to chew some mysterious leaves which, in turn, produced the required mass delusion. Presumably, the leaves referred to in this explanation are hashish, a product of an Indian hemp plant. However, while hashish is a known narcotic and intoxicant, it has never been associated with the type of instant delirium tremens as would be called for if this explanation were to make sense. Then, too, this solution leaves us guessing as to how this potent herb was distributed to the crowd ("peanuts, popcorn, hashish?"), or what reason was given for the somewhat unusual request that the spectators munch on strange dry leaves while waiting for the show to start.

Apparently recognizing these technical flaws in the "drug" theory, someone else came along with the idea that the hashish leaves, instead of being chewed, were burned, and that the smoke from the fire settled over the crowd, not unlike a stimulating smog, causing the spectators to see all sorts of strange things, among which, I suppose, was the Indian rope trick.

And then humorist Robert Benchley, in his book *My Ten Years in a Quandary*, put an end to all the non-

sense with the most sensible solution of all.

"The boy," explained Benchley, "gets up into the air somehow and drops the rope to the ground making it look as if the reverse were true." And then, as only he could, Benchley added, "This is only one way to do it, however. There are millions of ways."

Magicians, however, cannot entertain or mystify with legends. It's one thing to tell tall stories of human beings ignoring gravity, but quite another to demonstrate such defiance on brightly lighted stages. Still, it has been done. How? The first part of the solution came in 1847 from the French magical genius Robert-Houdin.

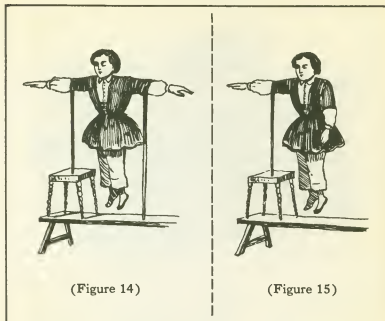
## Robert-Houdin's Levitation

The performer exhibits a long, low wooden bench about five feet long and a little over a foot in height. A two-foot-high stool is also shown and is placed on the bench at the center point.

An assistant (in this case, Robert-Houdin's six-year-old son) now stands on the stool with his arms extended from his sides. As though propping up the boy's outstretched arms, the magician slips a pole under each arm as shown in Figure 14. The poles are just long enough to extend from the bench up to the underside of the boy's arms.

After remarking on a hitherto unknown power embodied in the anesthetic ether, the performer gingerly uncorks a small (actually empty) bottle and waves it under the boy's nose. The boy's eyes droop, and, after a few seconds, he is asleep. The performer reaches

# WHAT BECAME OF GRAVITY?



(Figure 14)

(Figure 15)

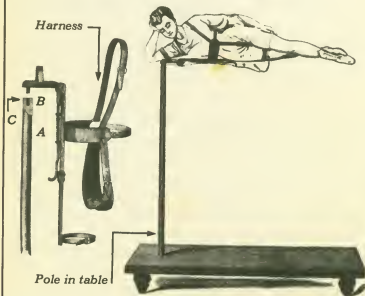
down and suddenly whips away the stool upon which the boy stands, but the sleeper's position remains unchanged. Since his feet no longer rest on the stool, it appears that he is supported by his outstretched arms resting on the poles. Next the performer removes one of these poles, and still the boy's position remains unchanged. To all appearances, he is defying gravity since he has no support other than the one pole on which his right arm is resting. (See Figure 15.)

The performer now lowers the left arm to the side and raises the boy's rigid body to a horizontal position. Gently he bends the boy's right arm so that its hand

(Figure 16)



*The final step in the illusion.*






supports the boy's head. This, the final step in the illusion, appears as in Figure 16.

As Robert-Houdin points out in his *Memoirs*, this "Ethereal Suspension" illusion resulted in a stunning triple climax. The first of the three surprises came when the stool on which the boy was standing was suddenly yanked away; the second, when the pole was removed; the last, and most startling of all, when the boy's body was elevated and then released so that he appeared to be resting in air, suspended by nothing other than the tip of one elbow. Robert-Houdin used the word "exploded" to describe the reaction of his audiences at this final revelation.

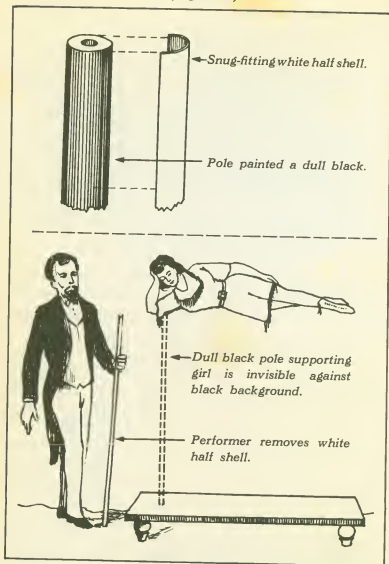
By reversing these steps, the stool is set back in its place atop the bench, the boy is lowered to the stool, the rod is removed, and a snap of the performer's fingers awakens the youngster who bows and skips off the stage.

 **Method:** The secret should be obvious from the illustrations. To begin with, the boy's body is encased in a sort of harness as pictured in Figure 16.

This harness, a combination of heavy leather and metal, is concealed beneath the boy's clothing and works on the same principle as an automobile jack: the boy can elevate his arm, but when he tries to lower it, a metal bar (a) engages the teeth of the ratchet (b) and he is prevented from bringing his arm down.

As will also be noted in Figure 16, one of the upright poles contains a socket (c) into which the underarm portion of the harness fits snugly and securely. Once the harness has been fitted into the pole in this manner,

(Figure 17)



*Variation on Robert-Houdin's levitation illusion in which both poles are removed.*

it is easily lifted to a horizontal position — the metal bar will slide over the teeth of the ratchet (the clicking sound you hear when the handle of an automobile jack is raised) — but once the harness is released, it will be prevented from dropping to the side by the metal bar which will catch in a notch of the ratchet, and the harness will remain stationary in whatever position it occupies at the time.

Put the boy in the harness and you get the same result except that, because the harness is concealed beneath his clothes, he appears to be cheating gravity.

The rest of the explanation should now be apparent. One of the poles, the one removed early in the trick, is unprepared. The other, the one that contains a socket into which the harness fits, is held in a rigid upright position as a result of having been fitted into a similar socket in the bench. The performer merely has to raise the boy's body to a horizontal position — and let go. Thanks to the ratchet, the boy will remain in that position until the performer pulls back on the hook-shaped bar. This frees the teeth of the ratchet and the boy can be lowered.

Audiences flocked to witness Robert-Houdin's aerial sleep, and many were convinced that the French wizard had managed to thwart gravity. Quick to recognize a good attraction, other magicians copied the illusion, most often using lightweight young ladies in place of the boy. Before long, multitudes of these young ladies throughout Europe and America were leisurely reclining on their funny bones.

However, a weak spot in the trick bothered magicians in their continuous struggle to make the impos-

sible possible. It was that one remaining pole. Get rid of that and — well, then they would have something. Imagine a human being afloat, unsupported in air! The magicians thought and planned and devised until they found a way to achieve the effect.

First, they performed the trick in front of a deep black curtain. Next, they painted the second of the two poles — the one on which the boy's elbow rests at the climax of the trick — a dull black to match the curtain. Finally, they constructed a snug-fitting half shell to cover the front, or audience side, of the now black post. This half shell, as well as the remaining post, was painted white. (See Figure 17.)

The trick was performed exactly as before except, as a climax, the magician would dramatically snatch away the pole from under the assistant's elbow and, uncannily, the effect was that of a human being reclining in air.

Of course, the magician didn't actually remove the second pole, but only appeared to do so by slipping off the white outer half shell. The pole beneath, because it had been painted black, was invisible against the black background, and the illusion was complete.

This was progress, but it still was not good enough. The lighting in the theater had to be just right, or the black background would not effectively conceal the black pole. Unfortunately, there were too few theaters in which the trick could be relied on, and too many keen-eyed spectators. A more practical method was needed.

It remained for another inventive genius to carry on where Robert-Houdin left off. This time it was an Englishman named John Nevil Maskelyne.

## Maskelyne's Levitation

Maskelyne's version of the levitation of a person was more direct and impressive than Robert-Houdin's: a young lady was "hypnotized," placed on a couch and, to the accompaniment of appropriate mood music was made to rise slowly into the air until she reached a point several feet above her original resting place.

The outstanding magician of the late 1800's, Harry Kellar, instantly recognized the possibilities of the illusion and obtained it for his own show. Both Kellar and his successor Thurston made the levitation of a young lady a high point of their performances. Reportedly, they spent over \$10,000 developing it to their satisfaction. A great sum of money for one trick, perhaps, but magic had become an important and lucrative part of show business.

In its final form, the levitation was an act in itself, presented in a setting of an ancient Hindu temple, complete with gongs and high priests. The performer set the mood by telling a story of mystical bygone days and of a beautiful priestess who was placed in a trance and caused to sleep through the centuries. The tale was not unfamiliar. In the good old days when magic was really magic, the landscape must have been cluttered with beautiful maidens sleeping off the effects of witches' spells and curses. This version, however, had a novel twist: the maiden slumbered in midair!

As the magician concluded his brief atmospheric narrative, the heroine of the story, Fernanda, was brought forward. A few hypnotic passes, and the girl became rigid and fell back into the arms of two attend-

ants who carried her to a couch near the back of the stage. Calling for absolute silence, the magician addressed the girl:

"Rise, Fernanda, I command you, rise. Rise as you rose in the Temple of Krishna one thousand years ago!"


The hollow tones of a gong reverberated and, accompanied by the low murmur of the praying priest, Fernanda, inch by inch, began to rise — up, up, up, the body of the sleeper rose until it floated a few feet above the couch. The couch was quietly removed. The magician tiptoed to the footlights and addressed the audience:

"There she lies, asleep in space, suspended by nothing but the power of thought. There she can remain in peace — for two hours, two weeks, two years. The slightest sound, the slightest whisper, can disturb her sleep."

Effective? One afternoon I saw this illusion performed in a spacious theater jammed to the rafters with noisy, squirming children. But while Fernanda slept, a cathedral-like silence settled over the awestruck youngsters. Even the gum chewing stopped. Yes, it was effective.

For the benefit of skeptics who might not have been converted by the magic of the moment, the magician took a previously examined hoop, and passed it over and around the girl's suspended body. Obviously this could not be done if there were wires, threads, or attachments of any kind.

What, then, held her up?

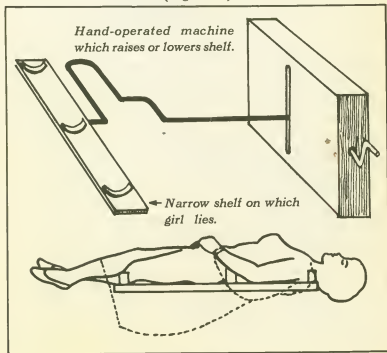
 *Method:* The secret is in the backstage use of a hand-operated machine which when cranked raises or lowers

#### WHAT BECAME OF GRAVITY?

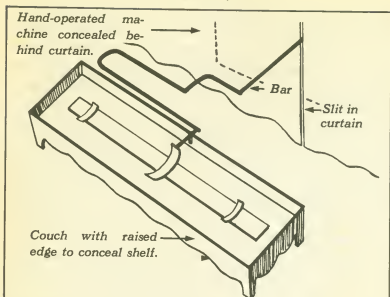
a long narrow shelf on which the girl lies. As the crank is turned, the bar which protrudes from the machine, and to which the shelf is attached, goes up or down, depending on the direction in which the crank is turned. Figure 18 represents a simplified drawing of the mechanism used.

The bar connecting the shelf to the machine is, you will note, bent into an odd meandering curve. This is an ingenious touch since, as will be explained, it not only permits the magician to stand behind the floating girl but it also makes it possible seemingly to pass a hoop around her body—one of the more deceptive and convincing points in the illusion.

(Figure 18)

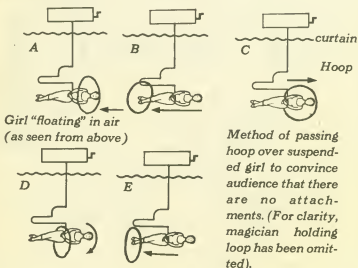


(Figure 19)



(Figure 20)

Machine concealed





Prior to the performance, the shelf is lowered so as to rest on the couch. The construction of the top of the couch conceals the presence of the shelf. Next, a curtain is lowered between the couch and the machine. The curtain is so designed as to conceal a long vertical slit through which the bar from the machine passes. (See Figure 19.)

Everything in place, the front curtains part and the audience sees only the couch; the machine is hidden away behind the back curtain. The girl is introduced, supposedly hypnotized, and after obediently lapsing into a trance she is lifted onto the couch directly on top the concealed shelf. (The full gown she is wearing will later serve to hide the shelf during the actual levitation.) On signal, a backstage assistant slowly cranks the machine and the girl slowly begins to rise.

When the desired height has been reached, the couch is slid to one side and the magician, taking a position in back of the girl, passes the hoop back and forth over her body. A review of Figure 20 will show how the hoop is handled. By visualizing the handling of the hoop from the viewpoint of the audience, it becomes apparent that even the more astute spectator is forced to concede that the girl's body is free of attachments — wires or whatever.

Prior to the business with the hoop, most spectators have a vague theory that the girl is suspended by invisible wires. The ingenious handling of the hoop shatters this theory and results in a stunning, baffling climax.

While the levitation illusion just described is entertaining and baffling, these qualities are not limited to large expensive illusions. Some of the finest and most

deceptive magic is of the "closeup" variety, spur-of-the-moment pocket tricks intended for audiences ranging from one person to small groups. Actually, such pocket tricks make up the bulk of material easily available in magic books and periodicals and occupy most of the space in the catalogs of magicians' supply houses. Though special equipment or sleight of hand is often a necessity, other tricks, equally effective, require only simple everyday objects and normal skill.

The following variation on an ancient trick is in this category; it makes use of a wooden pencil and a borrowed ring. Like Fernanda with her mattress of air, the ring is used to prove that the magician (in this instance, you) can overcome gravity.

## A Pencil—a Ring—and Gravity

Having borrowed a finger ring, the magician removes a pencil from his pocket and proceeds to discuss the levitation illusion in which a hoop was passed over a girl's floating body, thereby ruling out attachments of any kind. By way of illustration, the magician drops the ring over the pencil, lets it slide off the other end. He does this twice in the course of describing the girl-in-the-air illusion.

He explains that the hoop eliminates all possible explanations of why the girl remains in midair. He goes on to tell of a theory that ancient Egyptians used a magic formula to raise the massive stone blocks required for the construction of the pyramids. The magician mentions that he has recently come into possession of that formula and that he will conduct an experiment to determine whether scientists are correct in scoffing at the idea of overcoming gravity by magic.

The magician again places the ring on the pencil, but this time, instead of permitting it to slip off the other end, he closes off both ends by holding the pencil between his palms, as shown in Figure 21.

"Obviously," he points out, "there is no possible way of my making the ring rise up the pencil—except by magic. While I repeat the secret formula to myself—keep your eye on the ring."

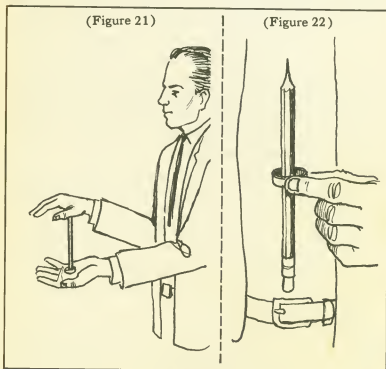
Sure enough, the ring leaves its resting place on the magician's palm and slowly starts to rise up the pencil. When the ring is close to the top of the pencil, the magician announces that he will vary the procedure by

## MAGICIAN'S MAGIC

reciting the formula *backwards*. The ring now reverses its upward direction and slowly slides down the pencil until it arrives back on the magician's palm.

Next, the magician holds the ring between his forefinger and thumb while the pencil is lowered into the ring. After a momentary hesitation, the magician lets go of the pencil, and it remains suspended within the ring. (See Figure 22.)

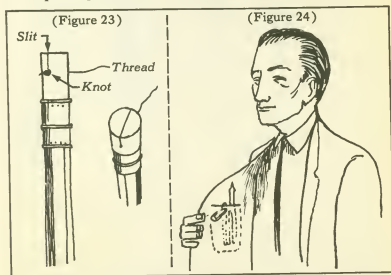
It is now the pencil's turn to rise slowly and fall. Finally the magician returns the ring to its owner and hands the pencil to anyone caring to inspect it. Having used a borrowed ring and an ordinary pencil, the magician leaves no clue as to how the trick was accomplished.



## WHAT BECAME OF GRAVITY?

**Method:** A little advance preparation is necessary. First you need a wooden pencil, the kind with an eraser at one end. Using a sharp razor blade, cut a slit down the center of this eraser. Next, obtain some extremely fine black thread — thread fine enough to be invisible at a distance of a few feet. Stores dealing in sewing supplies usually carry silk or nylon thread ideally suited to this trick.

After tying a knot at one end of the thread, slide it into the slit in the eraser. The knot keeps the thread from pulling clear of the slit. (See Figure 23.)

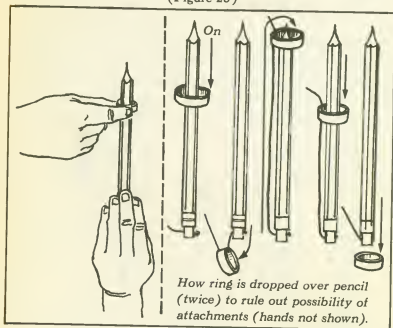


Snip off about three feet of the thread (when you rehearse the trick you will find the length that suits you best) and tie the free end to a small safety pin. Fasten the safety pin to the upper edge of your inside jacket pocket, place the pencil — pointed end uppermost — in the same pocket, and tuck the thread loosely also into the same pocket. (See Figure 24.)

# MAGICIAN'S MAGIC

Start by borrowing a ring — a girl's or woman's is best because such rings, being smaller, handle easier. With the ring in your right hand, use the left to remove the pencil from the pocket and hold it by the eraser, the pointed end up. (See Figure 25.)

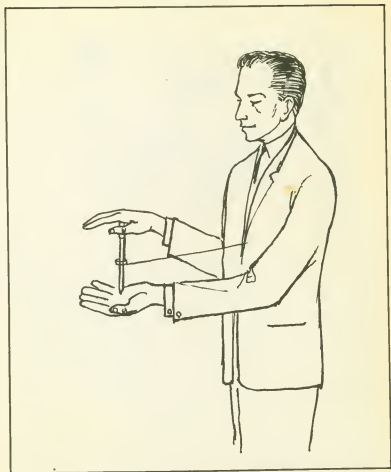
(Figure 25)



Be sure to stand far enough away from the onlookers to guarantee that the thread is beyond the range of their vision. Another word of caution: Don't mention the possibility of using a thread. By casually handling the ring in the manner shown, you are planting the idea that nothing is attached to the pencil. Don't arouse suspicion by even hinting at the use of a thread.

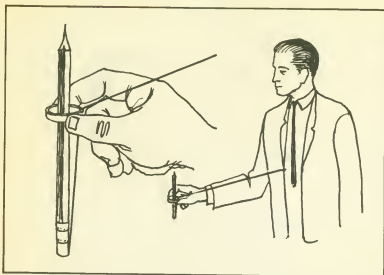
Now reverse the procedure by holding the pencil with its *eraser* end up. Drop the ring over the pencil

(Figure 26)



and leave enough slack in the thread to permit it to drop freely. Hold the pencil between your hands with the ring lying on the palm of your upturned left hand. If you now *slowly* and *gently* move your hands away from your body, the thread will tighten and the ring will begin its rise up the pencil. Similarly, by bringing the hands back toward your body, you will cause the ring to descend. (See Figure 26.)

(Figure 27)




After demonstrating your mysterious control over the ring, remove it from the pencil and, eraser-end first, lower the pencil into the ring, which at this point, is held between your thumb and forefinger. When the pencil is at its midway point, move the hands forward so as to draw the thread taut. Gingerly let go of the pencil and, thanks to the thread, it will appear to be suspended within the ring. Mention that the formula works for the pencil as well as the ring, and cause the pencil to move up and down in the same manner as you did the ring. (See Figure 27.)

Finally, take the pencil in the right hand, the ring in the left, and extend both forward away from your body as you approach the owner of the ring. This action will cause the thread first to tighten and then to snap out of the slit in the eraser. It will hang down unnoticed under your jacket as you return the ring and hand over the pencil for inspection.



# INTO THIN AIR

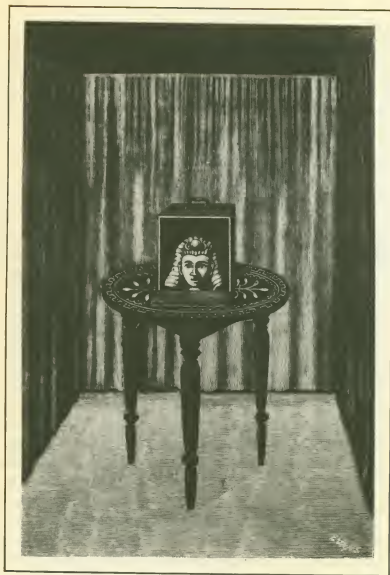
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atter, we are told by scientists, can neither be created nor destroyed. To put it another way, you can't make something out of nothing — no more than you can take something and change it into nothing.

Magicians, however, have a habit of ignoring the sacred rules of science. For centuries they have been causing everything from mice to elephants to appear or disappear at a snap of the fingers or the wave of a wand.

And how do magicians accomplish these impossibilities? Without exaggeration, it would require hundreds of books the size of this one to explain all of the tricks in which objects are produced from nowhere or dissolved into nothingness. Consequently, since the best we can hope for is a slight scratching of the surface, let's start with a trick that stirred up tremendous public interest when it first appeared about a hundred years ago — a trick, or rather a principle — which prompted an expression that is now part of our language. But first, here's the trick.

(Figure 28)



*The famous "Sphinx" illusion.*

# The Sphinx

In 1865, Thomas Tobin, a Londoner with a scientist's interest in optical illusions, invented a remarkable trick which he sold to a magician who called himself "Colonel Stodare." "The Sphinx," as Stodare named the trick, created a sensation. Even the curiosity of the queen was aroused and a special performance was arranged at the palace to permit Victoria to see this "unbelievable miracle" for herself.

When reading the following description of the "miracle," bear in mind that most magicians of the Victorian Era made a practice of using heavily draped tables as well as cumbersome, and often highly suspicious, apparatus. The simplicity and apparent innocence of the articles used to create the seemingly impossible "Sphinx" illusion, stunned its nineteenth-century audience. These articles consisted of a frail three-legged table, revealed as the curtain rose, and a plain fifteen-inch square box, carried in by the magician.


After setting the box on the table, the magician lowered its hinged front to reveal what appeared to be a human head disguised to resemble the head of the Sphinx with closed eyes. Stepping back, the magician pointed to the head and commanded, "Sphinx—awake!"

The eyes slowly opened and the head proceeded to carry on a conversation with the magician and even, on request, to recite a bit of poetry. There was nothing mechanical in this performance. The head was obviously that of a human being. Disconcertingly and inexplicably, it appeared to function normally without

the customary attachment of a body. (See Figure 28.)

Finally, the magician closed the box, but the audience demanded more. Raising his hand for silence, the magician apologized for being unable to continue. The magic charm responsible for bringing the ancient Egyptian back to life had worn off, he explained. The power of the charm had a life-span of only ten or fifteen minutes; after that, the head returned to the dust of the ages from whence it came.

As dramatic proof, he opened the box again this time to reveal that not only was the head gone, but in its place lay a small pile of dust!

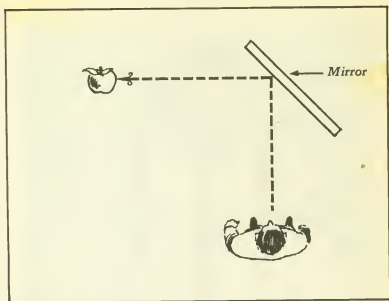
 *Method:* If ever you have heard the remark, "It's all done with mirrors," you know now that this trick prompted the expression. It also gave rise to a principle which, years ago, was used in many other tricks. It is called the mirror principle.

Magicians use mirrors to deceive people by taking advantage of a simple but impressive-sounding law of optics which states that, "The angle of reflection is equal to the angle of incidence." This means that if you look into a slanted mirror, instead of seeing your own reflection, you will see the reflection of something off to one side. Figure 29 explains the idea.

By a clever application of this idea, two mirrors — properly arranged and with similarly colored drapes at sides and back — can conceal any object placed behind them, without revealing that mirrors are being used. This is exactly what the inventor of "The Sphinx" accomplished. Figure 30 shows how.

As you can see, the table stands in a sort of booth,

(Figure 29)

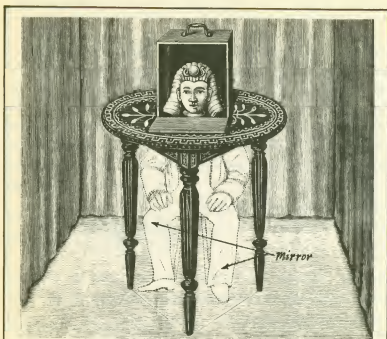


the sides of which are made of the same material as the back. As with the slanted mirror and the apple (Figure 29), the two mirrors between the table legs reflect the sides of the booth. Because the sides and back are of identical material, the spectators believe they are looking between and beyond the table legs. The illusion is startlingly real. Even knowing the secret, it is difficult to credit the idea that you are not actually looking at a plain bare table.

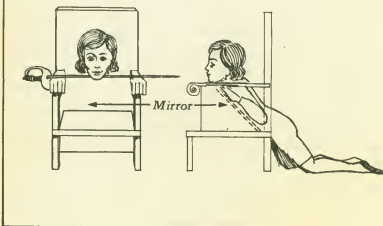
The rest of the preparation is simple. An assistant, made up to resemble the Sphinx, is hidden behind the mirrors (Figure 30) directly below a trapdoor in the tabletop which, when opened, permits the assistant to poke his head up into the box.

When the curtains open, the magician enters carrying the box which, unknown to the spectators, is

(Figure 30)



(Figure 31)



bottomless. Following a few remarks concerning the wonders of ancient Egypt, the magician places the box on the table directly over the trapdoor. For obvious reasons, the magician, at this point, carefully avoids stepping between the mirrors and the sides of the booth.

The assistant, hearing the box touch the table, releases the trapdoor and pushes his head up into the box. A moment later, the front is lowered to reveal the sleeping Sphinx.

The rest of the trick is as described. After the magician and the "head" have concluded their chat, the magician closes the box, and the assistant ducks back down behind the mirrors. Before closing the trapdoor, the assistant reaches up through the hole where he lately had his head and places a handful of dust on the tabletop, in keeping with the trick's climax in which it is revealed that the spell has worn off and the head has returned to its original dust.

Eventually "The Sphinx" was purchased by a nineteenth-century wax museum in Paris where it became part of an exhibit depicting the tortures of the Inquisition. Visitors were led from one wax horror to the next until they arrived at what appeared to be a reproduction of a severed head resting on an appropriately bloodied table. This, of course, was a gory version of the illusion just described — minus the box. The visitors' nerves, already on edge, were all but shattered when the supposedly lifeless head opened its eyes and tonelessly related the events leading up to its present predicament. The exhibit was successful for a year or so until groups of Parisian teen-agers began to frequent the museum for the sole purpose of bombarding the obviously defenseless heads with nuts, bits of candy, and

anything else that came to hand. Such treatment, apparently, was worse than that received during the Inquisition, and the head — or rather, its owner — quit. The exhibit was withdrawn.

Years later the mirror principle was widely used as crowds gathered in front of sideshows and carnivals. In this version, the head, usually that of an attractive young lady, appeared to be balanced on the edge of a sword which rested across the arms of a large chair or throne. (See illustration on page 6.)

As shown in Figure 31, a single mirror creates the desired illusion. The seat of the chair is of the same material and color as its back and sides — thus spectators are led to believe that the back of the chair shows beneath the sword. In reality, they are looking into a mirror which reflects the *seat* of the chair. Again, as was true in the original version, the illusion is perfect and the effect, astonishing.

As I mentioned in the opening chapter, this head-on-sword illusion was responsible for awakening my interest in magic. Used as a crowd-gatherer in front of a boardwalk sideshow, the head of the smiling young lady balanced so neatly on a sword's edge was a source of solemn wonder to the youngster I used to be. Later, when the manager of the sideshow unraveled the mystery by allowing paying customers to step up and see how it worked, I learned that a large ball of wadded paper played its part in heightening the effectiveness of the trick.

With this paper ball — it was about the size of a girl's head — wrapped in a large cloth and tucked under his arm, the sideshow barker would announce that the cloth contained a living head. After describing the



fantastic attractions to be seen "on the inside" — a description about as honest and accurate as his calling the wad of newspaper a human head — the barker with one hand would hold the wrapped paper ball against the edge of the sword while, with his free hand, he began to unwind the cloth. The girl who until now had been completely hidden behind the mirror would raise herself up at this moment, to rest her chin on the edge of the sword. The open cloth momentarily concealing the girl's head also concealed the paper ball as it dropped down behind the mirror, alongside the girl's body. When the barker whisked away the cloth — wonder of wonders — there was the living head he had promised!

Before the spectators were through gaping, the barker spread his cloth as if to rewrap the "head." Thus concealed, the girl would quickly duck down behind the mirror, simultaneously' handing up the wad of paper. A twist of the cloth around the substitute "head," and the barker left the platform carrying his mysterious burden with him.

Innumerable are the methods devised by magicians (aside from the use of mirrors) to make it appear that visible matter is invisible. Among the many I choose one that is justifiably outstanding.

Many years ago a magician named Nixon made a career out of challenging audiences to explain how three ducks — very much alive and fluttering — could be made to vanish without trace, or clue. So ingenious was Nixon's trick, that he gave his audience advance warning of what was to happen — a practice usually avoided by magicians as it destroys the element of sur-

prise. This trick, I think, comes as close as any other in illustrating the similarity between tricks and mystery stories.

The ducks must go somewhere. There has to be a clue. Like the author of a good mystery, however, its inventor hid his clues well.


## Where Do the Ducks Go?

The curtains part to reveal a table covered by a cloth which hangs down about a foot on all sides. The table supports a fairly large flimsy-looking box, the top of which is hinged to the side nearest the audience. An assistant wheels in a stand containing a wicker cage which houses three ducks. One by one the magician slowly and deliberately transfers the ducks from the cage to the box.

"Watch closely now. The ducks are going to vanish and I defy you to answer the question, 'Where do the ducks go?'" The magician follows this challenge by a clap of his hands and proceeds to take the box apart. First he removes the top; then one side; then the other; the front comes next, and lastly the back and the bottom. The box has been reduced to a pile of thin sections. With the box out of the way, attention now centers on the table. The ducks could be under the tabletop, concealed by the overhanging cloth. They must be there, because there's no place else they *could* be.

The magician appears uncomfortable as he senses that the audience is suspicious of the table. Reluctantly,

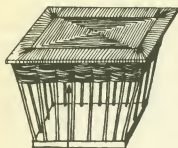
he removes the tablecloth, but in so doing he openly flips the table on its side, obviously for the purpose of hiding its undersection from the audience. Pretending not to realize the desire of the audience to see both sides of the tabletop, the magician removes each of the four table legs and tosses them aside. Suddenly and disastrously a few white feathers poke out from behind the tabletop. The magician makes an attempt to cover this "accident," but he's too late; the audience has seen the flash of white. Shrugging to indicate that he has no choice but to turn the tabletop, the magician reaches down and removes the feathers. They turn out to be part of a feather duster with which he casually flicks the tabletop as he slowly rotates it to reveal to a very much baffled audience that there is nothing concealed on either side.

 *Method:* As the reader may have suspected, though everything in sight has been dismantled, the ducks don't really disappear. The answer is that they are neatly and cleverly tucked away out of sight, and are quietly and innocently carried off by the assistant.

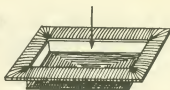
Three factors combine to fool even the closest of observers. First, the lid of the cage contains a hidden panel fastened by weak springs so as to sink into the cage whenever pressure is applied to the top of the closed cage. (See Figure 32.)

Secondly, the box into which the ducks are placed has a cloth pocket attached to the inside of its lid. While supposedly placing the ducks in the box, the magician is, in reality, tucking them into this pocket. Figure 33 shows how this is done. Because the box opens outward (toward the audience), the spectators have no reason

(Figure 32)

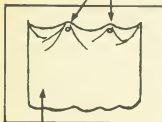


*Closely woven wicker rim around top of cage conceals bag.*



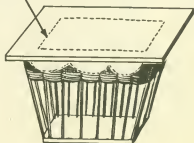
*Panel in cage top sinks part way down when pressure is applied.*

*snap fasteners*



*How bag is fastened to underside of the top of box.*

*Top of box—appears to be thin piece of wood because bag containing the ducks has sunk into cage.*



to suspect that the ducks are not going into the box proper.

The third factor — and the most important — is the magician himself. His timing, showmanship, and acting ability are as much a part of the trick as the items mentioned. Here's how the trick goes:

As described, the magician supposedly transfers the ducks from cage to box whereas, in reality, they go into the pocket attached to the lid of the box. This transfer calls for careful handling and a bit of acting. The magician directs all his attention toward the interior of the box. He must duplicate the motions he would make were he really placing the ducks in the box itself.

With the ducks safely tucked away, the pocket is snapped shut by means of the fastener shown and the magician lowers the lid. A clap of the hands and the box is speedily dismantled. This calls for careful timing. First the magician removes the top and casually places it aside, on top of the wicker cage. As mentioned, the cage top contains a panel which, under pressure, opens inward on weak springs. The bulging pocket containing the ducks, forces the panel downward and the top of the box, which is now seen in profile, appears to be nothing other than a thin slab of wood resting on top of the cage. The pocket is hidden from view by the closely woven upper section of the wicker cage.

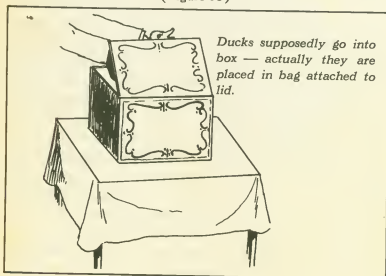
The magician observes two important points at this stage of the trick: he handles the top of the box as though it were, in fact, nothing but a light, thin slab of wood and he centers his attention on the interior of the box, just as though the ducks were still there.

Without hesitation, he next removes one of the sides and places it on the cage, where it joins the top section

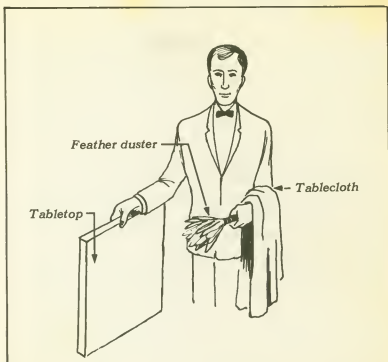
already there. In similar fashion the rest of the box is taken apart, its pieces stacked on top of the cage. The entire art of dismantling the box is performed as one continuous motion — without hurry or hesitation. The point is that the magician does not allow the audience time to mull over what they are seeing; otherwise they might realize that the magician showed them only one side of the top section.

Even now, the audience is given no chance to dwell on what has taken place, for no sooner has the box been demolished than the magician steals a quick guilty glance at the draped table. He goes about the business of simultaneously whipping off the cloth and upending the table. In doing this, he flips the white feather duster, which is temporarily fastened to the underside of the table, so as to reveal a few of the feathers to the audience. At this precise moment, the assistant wheels

(Figure 33)



(Figure 34)



the stand and its contents off the stage. No attention is being paid to the assistant at this point because all eyes are centered on those incriminating feathers peeking around the edge of the table. Now, although the members of the audience don't realize it, they are lost. The evidence has been wheeled away, the clues are gone. It only remains for the magician to build to a climax by tossing aside the legs of the table, then revealing the feather duster and, lastly, the innocent underside of the table. No ducks! (See Figure 34.)

By this time the spectators are so remote from the solution that it's just about impossible for them to find their way back.

## The Joker Knows

While most tricks in which objects vanish require special apparatus or skill, I have here devised one that requires neither. It can be performed by the reader a few moments after completion of the necessary preparation, but to be on the safe side, a few advance trials are recommended.

Try it if you wish to know how it feels to convince someone that you can make things disappear. It includes an added feature in that you deliberately lead the onlookers astray. When they are properly confused, the vanished object (in this case a playing card) reappears in a most unexpected place.

The performer removes a pack of playing cards from its case, tosses the case aside and, placing the pack face down before a spectator, requests that it be cut into two fairly even piles. The spectator is then requested to note and remember the card to which he had cut. The card is not removed from the pack; it is merely peeked at.

After the cards have been gathered together and shuffled, the spectator, on request, announces the card to which he had cut. It is, say, the Four of Hearts.

No sooner has the card been made known than the magician, apparently as an afterthought, explains that he forgot to remove the Joker from the pack. Fanning through the cards, their faces away from the spectators, he takes out one card and places it aside face down. He conveys the impression that this card is the Joker, *but does not show its face*.


The performer now taps the pack and, as impressively as possible, commands the Four of Hearts to vanish.



With an air of triumph, he slowly deals the entire pack face up, one card at a time, to show that his command has been obeyed — the Four of Hearts is gone. Far from being amazed, the spectators are highly suspicious of the face-down card that is *supposed* to be the Joker. Since the performer didn't remove that card until *after* the selected card had been announced — and since the Four of Hearts is no longer in the pack — this so-called Joker (the watchers feel) *must* be the selected Four.

Following a suitable amount of stalling, the magician, with pretended reluctance, allows the face-down card to be turned up. To the spectators' surprise, it is the Joker! Where, then, has the Four of Hearts gone? By way of answering this question, attention is directed to a message written across the face of the Joker. It reads: "LOOK IN THE CARD CASE."

The case, which has been lying untouched and in full view all along, is opened and — out drops the missing Four of Hearts!

 *Method:* The trick, as mentioned, requires preparation. In addition to a pack containing a Joker, you will need an extra card taken from a pack with a back design that matches the pack you are going to use. For purposes of explanation, we will assume the extra, or duplicate, card to be the Four of Hearts.

With the original and the duplicate Four of Hearts in front of you, paste or glue the duplicate Four to the *back* of any of the other cards. As shown in Figure 35, only the middle sections of the card are glued together; the top and bottom sections remain free. Magicians, incidentally, would refer to this card as a "gimmick," a term they use to designate any secret device used in a trick.

(Figure 35)



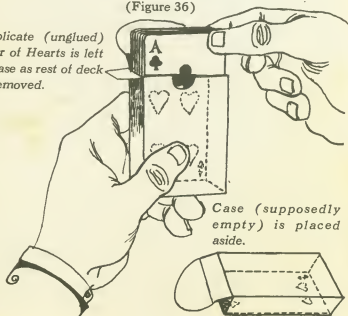
*Spread paste or glue across middle section of card.*



*Four of Hearts is glued to back of another card.*

(Figure 36)

*Duplicate (unglued) Four of Hearts is left in case as rest of deck is removed.*



*Case (supposedly empty) is placed aside.*

#### INTO THIN AIR

With the two cards fastened together as explained, remove the Joker and, across its face in heavy black ink write or print the message, "LOOK IN THE CARD CASE." Having done this, return the Joker to the pack.

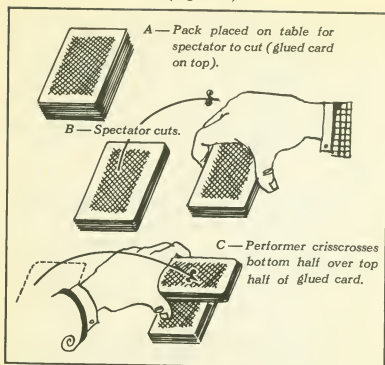
Place the glued cards face down on top of the face-down pack and drop the regular (unglued) Four of Hearts on top of all, also face down. The entire pack now goes into the card case, and you are ready to perform.

Begin by removing the card case from your pocket and the pack from the case. However, in doing this you leave behind in the case, the unprepared Four. (See Figure 36.) Of course, the spectators must not know that a card is left in the case. It must be done naturally, without arousing suspicion, and the case should be tossed aside carelessly — just as would be done if it were, indeed, empty.

The pack is placed face down in front of a spectator who, as directed, cuts it into approximately equal halves. Keep in mind that the glued card was on top prior to the cut and you must, therefore, watch as the pack is cut in order to know which of the two halves has the glued card on top. Knowing this, openly pick up the *other* half (the one *without* the glued card) and place it crisscross over the "gimmicked" card. (See Figure 37.)

It now becomes necessary to divert the attention of the spectator from the cards for a few moments during which he begins to lose track of which half is which. To accomplish this, *look at the spectator* and ask, "Do you believe in magic — *real* magic? Do you believe that something can be caused to vanish — disappear — into thin air? Do you think that's possible?"

(Figure 37)



When addressed in this manner, and particularly when he is being pressed for a direct answer to a direct question, the spectator is forced to look at you, thus taking his mind and eyes off the cards. Regardless of his answer, you lift off and lay aside the top crisscrossed section (originally the bottom section of the pack) and pick up the remaining half, on top of which is the glued Four of Hearts.

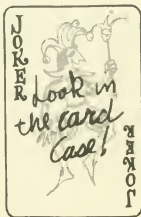
Holding this half face down near one end, as shown in Figure 38, you gently lift up the end of the top card, saying, as you do so, "Please look at this card and remember it, but don't tell me what it is."

(Figure 38)

*Performer lifts end of top card to allow spectator to see its face.*

*Spectator sees index corner of glued Four of Hearts.*

*Message written across face of Joker.*



You have, of course, lifted up the outer edge of the glued Four of Hearts. A word of caution at this point: do not bend the card back any more than is necessary for the spectator to peek at it. As soon as the card has been noted, place the half pack down, pick up the other half, and drop it on top, remarking, "Very well, we'll just leave your card right there in the center." Actually, of course, the spectator did *not* look at the card cut at. By crisscrossing the halves and distracting his attention, you have misled him to believe that the card originally on top (the glued Four of Hearts) is the card to which he had cut. This is what magicians call a "force." If you have any doubts about whether it will fool people, try it. Magicians have been using this particular "force" for many, many years. Just follow the instructions and, above all, *don't* ask the spectator to look at the card to which he had cut. This will be taken for granted. If you emphasize it, suspicions will be aroused.

After reassembling the pack, give it a few cuts or shuffles and ask the spectator to announce the name of the card looked at. The moment he names the card, you suddenly "remember" that you neglected to discard the Joker. Fan through the cards (with their faces toward you) and, *without showing its face*, remove the Joker and place it aside, face down. This action, of course, is highly suspicious. Your having waited until the card was named before you decided to discard the Joker will lead spectators to conclude that the card just removed is not the Joker but is, in fact, the card that was just named. If, by your actions, you can encourage this belief, so much the better.

All that remains is to build to a climax. Command

the selected card to leave the pack and prove your power by openly dealing through the cards to show that the named card is missing. Do not pause or hesitate when you come to the glued card during the dealing. Naturally, since the Four of Hearts is firmly fastened to the back of this card, it will not show up in the deal.

The focus of attention will now be on the one card remaining face down — the card which you claim to be the Joker. Since the selected card is not in the pack, spectators will conclude that this *must* be the card in question. This is where a little acting helps a lot. You are reluctant to show the card, but finally you give in. Up to now, the spectator will be inclined to believe you are playing a joke on him — the trick seems that obvious. Now, for the first time, he is jolted! The face-down card *is* the Joker and before he has time to absorb this development fully, call his attention to the Joker's message. Let *him* open the card case and find his card — it's more effective that way.





# OUT OF NOWHERE

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Just as magicians — and their audiences — are intrigued with the idea of objects vanishing without a trace, so too is it fascinating to see something appear where previously there was nothing.

The outstanding example of this type of magic — though, in reality it is more a symbol of conjuring than a trick — is the celebrated “Rabbit from Hat.” Why the idea of finding a rabbit in a previously empty top hat developed into the magicians’ trademark is a mystery in itself. It certainly didn’t come about because the trick was popular with magicians or performed by them with any frequency. Most magicians avoid it because the conditions under which it must be done are too difficult, even for a profession that thrives on accomplishing the impossible. Let a magician touch, or even simply glance, at a hat, and his audience instantly assumes he is going to conjure up a rabbit. Not only is he thus faced with the loss of the important element of surprise, but now he has another problem: he has to

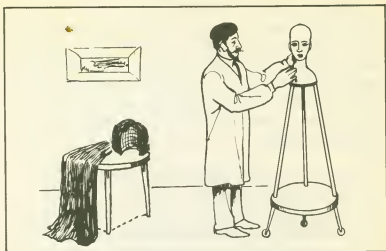
smuggle a bulky, squirming rabbit into the hat at a time when everyone knows he is going to attempt just that. It can be done, of course; many ingenious methods have been worked out. For the most part, however, magicians rue the day Alexander Herrmann first entertained the bizarre notion of finding live bunnies in borrowed top hats.

On the more practical side, we have multitudes of fine tricks in which objects appear, apparently from nowhere. So many, in fact, that it is no simple matter to narrow the selection. The illusion about to be described has been chosen, not only because it illustrates the high degree of ingenuity exercised by magicians to achieve the effect of producing something from nowhere but also because it is probably the most baffling stage trick of all. Its creator, a magician named Boelke, devoted a lifetime to its perfection. He drilled himself and his assistants until there was nothing to suspect, nothing to question. He named his miracle "Creo" but later the name was changed to "The Vampire" because Kipling's poem of the same name was mentioned in its presentation.

## The Vampire

On stage is a round three-legged stool, one foot in height. Off to one side stands an undraped table on which rests a plaster head of a woman, a wig, a comb and brush, a length of material suitable for an evening gown, an artist's palette, and three long metal rods. All these properties, including the table and stool, are en-

(Figure 39)



closed in a booth decorated to represent an artist's studio.


The magician enters, wearing the traditional artist's attire: a smock and beret. He laments the fact that he has no model to pose for him. Studying the odd assortment on the table, he remarks, as if thinking aloud, "The poet Kipling tells us that a woman is a rag, a bone, and a hank of hair." As he speaks, he lifts the objects from the table. On the word "rag," he holds up the dress; the bone is represented by the plaster head; the hank of hair by the wig. Suddenly inspired, he gathers up the rods, hurries to the stool, and on it forms the rods into a tripod at the top of which he sets the plaster head. (See Figure 39.) He steps back and assumes an artistic pose in order to study the result. An assistant enters and hands him the wig. This he sets in place on the plaster head, and he and the assistant then drape the gown, with its long train, about the tripod formed by the rods.

Next the easel, the comb, and the brush are put to work. The cheeks are dabbed pink, the lips colored red, the wig adjusted and combed, and a few final adjustments are made to the gown. All the while the stool on which the tripod rests is turned this way and that on its castors until the artist-magician is satisfied with all angles of his handiwork. Then stepping back, he returns to Kipling's poem,

*A fool there was and he made his prayer  
 (Even as you and I!)  
 To a rag and a bone and a hank of hair,  
 (We called her the woman who did not care)  
 And this fool, he called her his lady fair —*

No sooner is the last line uttered than the "plaster" head opens its eyes and smiles. The rag, bone, and hank of hair, it develops, have been miraculously transformed into a very fair and very much alive young lady who hops from the stool to join the delighted artist; the two dance about the stage as the curtains slowly close on the happy scene.

And if that isn't magic — what is?

 **Method:** The explanation of this illusion accents an important ingredient in the performance of stage tricks: teamwork. Note the vital roles played by the assistants, the split-second timing required. Their actions must blend with the magician's. It's the magician's job, in turn, to see that this harmony is accomplished — and maintained. Often, we suspect, spectators look upon stage illusionists as affable gentlemen who clap hands or fire pistols while some mechanical contrivance does

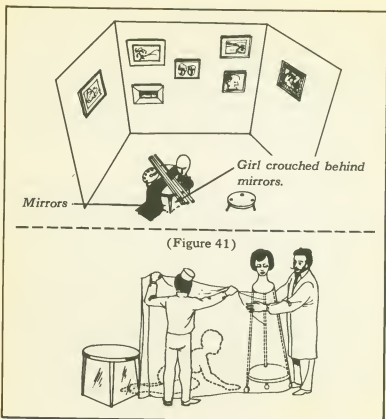
the work. This notion is as false as assuming that the sole function of an orchestra leader is to wave a baton. The work between performances — the work of rehearsing — is as vital as what goes on after the curtains part. The highly successful illusionist Thurston offered a three-word formula for his success: "Drill, drill, drill." As with any theatrical production, every move must be perfected before the show goes on. And it must be kept that way.

In "The Vampire," our old friend the mirror plays an important, but carefully hidden, role. The innocent-looking table on which the plaster head and the other objects rest is identical with the mirror-table used in "The Sphinx" illusion described earlier. (See page 104.)

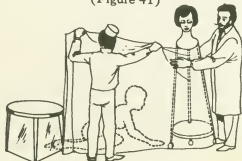
At the start, the spectators see two undraped pieces of furniture: the table and the low stool. The girl destined to be "created" is crouched behind the table, hidden from view by the mirrors. The audience can't see her because, while they *think* they see between and beyond the table legs, they are actually looking at the reflection of the side walls of the booth. (See Figure 40.)

The trick is performed as described, up to the point at which it becomes necessary to drape the "gown" around the tripod. The gown is really nothing more than a long piece of dress material, one end of which is so designed as to resemble the front of a dress. Here's where the vital action takes place. Even knowing what to look for won't help, should you blink at the wrong moment. The magician drapes the front, or audience, side of the tripod with the gown and prepares to swing the rest of the material around to the back. The assistant helps by straightening the material. For the merest moment, the length of cloth is held so that it stretches

(Figure 40)



(Figure 41)



between the partially covered tripod and the table. Taking advantage of this momentary shield, the girl crouches low and scoots from behind the mirrors to the makeshift tent created by the partially covered tripod. (See Figure 41.) This transference of the girl is done with lightning speed and without a pause on the part of the magician who continues to drape the cloth around the back. Hidden within the covered tripod, the girl straightens, grasps the neck of the plaster head, and awaits the next phase of the trick.

Acting out the role of an artist, the magician dabs the plaster face, tints the skin, rouges the cheeks, reddens the lips. In doing this he attempts to duplicate the coloring of the hidden girl. Before the start of the trick, the girl had applied her makeup liberally so as to simplify the job of matching the real with the plaster face.


The stool is rotated as the wig is adjusted and combed. The moment the back of the plaster head is toward the audience, the girl secretly removes the plaster head from under the wig and replaces it with her own. The magician holds the wig in position during the few seconds necessary for this unseen substitution. The girl has room to conceal the plaster head in a pocket within her ample gown. The rods (they are telescopic) are tucked away in a trap in the stool. The girl's eyes are closed as the stool is again spun to face the audience who see nothing amiss because of the close resemblance between the two faces. After a final dab or two, the magician steps back to admire the results. At the proper moment the girl's eyes open, she smiles — she has come to life!

While the materialization of a human being is one of the more spectacular types of "production" tricks, magicians are continually demonstrating that the air about them is cluttered with unseen objects. Knowing there is a trick to it all, audiences assume that objects produced by magicians are concealed somewhere in the magician's clothes. To combat this assumption, magicians delight in conjuring up articles that can't possibly be hidden away in sleeves or under coats. A particularly popular production is that of a huge bowl of water, with or without goldfish.

## Production of a Bowl of Water

Exhibiting a large and obviously empty cloth, the magician drapes it over his extended left arm. Suddenly, he appears to "see" something suspended in air to his right. Crouching, he cautiously approaches this invisible object and, triumphantly, throws the cloth over it. Whatever it is, this "something" is large and heavy. Struggling toward a nearby table, the magician staggers and — oops — he almost dropped it! Now, at least, we have a clue: it contains water — some just splashed on the stage. The table is reached, the cloth whipped away, and the mysterious object is revealed to be a huge glass bowl, brimful of water.

Now where did that come from? Not, certainly, from under the magician's coat. Aside from the problem of the water, the bowl is simply too big to be so concealed. The suit the magician is wearing is close-fitting. To conceal effectively an object of the proportions of the bowl, the magician would have to be attired in a medium-sized tent.

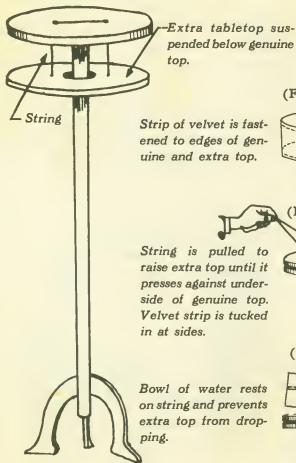
 *Method:* The secret is in the table and in the magician's ability to convince his audience that he has something under the cloth when, in reality, he has nothing. The supposedly accidental spilling of the water helps in establishing this bit of make-believe. Figures 42 - 46 illustrates the construction of the table.

To begin with, the table started out as a perfectly ordinary single-pedestal type with a round top supported by three triangular-spaced legs.

The first step in the preparation consists of making



(Figure 42)



*Strip of velvet is fastened to edges of genuine and extra top.*

*String is pulled to raise extra top until it presses against underside of genuine top. Velvet strip is tucked in at sides.*

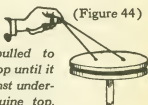
*Bowl of water rests on string and prevents extra top from dropping.*

*False drape placed over bowl hangs down to conceal edges of genuine and extra tops.*

(Figure 43)



(Figure 44)



(Figure 45)



(Figure 46)



an additional tabletop, the identical size of the original, but with a hole in its center large enough to permit it to be raised or lowered along the center rod of the table. This extra top is then suspended below the genuine tabletop by means of a loop of string as shown in Figure 43.

It will be noted that the string runs through two holes in the genuine top and is fastened to the extra top — so that this extra top will hang below the real top until the string is pulled (Figure 44), at which time the extra top will be raised until it presses against the upper, or real, top.

The next step in the preparation calls for a strip of black velvet to be fastened around the tabletop. The upper edge of the velvet strip is attached to the genuine top while the lower edge is attached to the extra top, as shown in Figure 45.

A clear glass bowl — the diameter of which is *exactly* that of the tabletop — is filled with water and, after pulling on the string so as to bring the extra top up until it presses against the underside of the genuine top (the velvet strip is tucked in at the sides), the bowl is set on the table where, thanks to its weight, it presses on the taut string and keeps the genuine and extra tops pressed together.

The final bit of preparation involves a false drape (Figure 46) which is placed over the bowl so that it hangs down to cover, not only the bowl, but the edges of the two tabletops as well.

This advance preparation completed, the magician enters the stage carrying a large cloth, the corner of which conceals a water-soaked sponge. Pretending to see something suspended alongside him, he drapes the

(Figure 47)

*A — Magician drapes cloth over arm and brings other arm up underneath as if holding large object.*



*B — Screened by cloth, magician lifts off false drape.*



*C — By raising bowl slightly, string is released and extra top drops.*

cloth over his left shoulder and arm and suddenly brings his right arm up under the cloth, as though holding a large object (Figure 47).

The situation calls for some dramatics. The magician struggles, staggers, breathes heavily. In short, he goes through the motions of carrying a burdensome object. He heads for the table, but before he gets there he pretends to slip and, simultaneously, squeezes the saturated sponge. Water splashes on the stage for all to see, and he hurriedly, and with obvious relief, deposits his supposedly heavy load on the table.

At this point, the cloth draped over the left arm completely screens the upper section of the table and the right hand quickly removes the false drape that covers the bowl and proceeds to raise the bowl a trifle — just enough to release the string imprisoned beneath. Once the string is freed, the extra top drops of its own weight and the magician quickly whips away the cloth (the false drape is concealed within its folds) to reveal the huge, gleaming bowl of water.

And if he's a good showman, the magician, at this point, will dab a bit of the water on his brow and remark on his near accident.

The reader may wonder why the sudden reduction in the height of the table isn't noticed by the audience. Actually, this point *is* noticed, but since the trick has been successfully performed on countless thousands of occasions and on stages throughout the world, it would seem that the average spectator suffers from a failing that plagued Sherlock Holmes' friend, Dr. Watson. "You see," Holmes would explain to his companion, "but you do not *observe*."

## Made Whole Again

To restore magically, make whole again, that which has been severed, smashed, or destroyed is a theme that runs through the history of magic from early Egypt to the present. And it doesn't seem to matter whether the wonder worker is dealing with sliced-up people, smashed watches, burned handkerchiefs, or ruined hats — just so long as everything is eventually restored good as new. Which, of course, it is.

The most famous of such tricks — probably the best known of all, if we exclude the rabbit in hat — is that bizarre illusion in which it appears that a very much alive young lady is sawed in half. Created in 1921 by a magician named Selbit, the trick, when later improved and dramatized, captured the public's fancy to an amazing degree.

Selbit conceived and performed the original version of the trick in England. News of its enthusiastic reception quickly spanned the Atlantic and reached the ears of a famous English illusionist, Horace Goldin, who happened to be in New York at the time. Goldin worked out an improved version and other magicians added their own touches. In its final form, the "sawing" trick became a complete act in itself containing, as it did, generous portions of comedy, drama and, of course, mystery. Goldin gave it a trial performance and, delighted with the result, featured it at New York's Palace Theater in July, 1921. The theatrical newspaper *Variety* reported it to be a sensation — the talk of the town. *Variety* made an interesting and accurate observa-

tion: people going into the theater were certain they had the solution, but their pet theories evaporated when they saw the trick performed. When you read the explanation, you'll understand the public's dilemma.

## Sawing a Lady in Half

Resting on a platform, fairly close to the footlights, is a bright red box measuring approximately five feet in length, three feet in depth. It is a box of many doors—two in front, two on top, two in back. When all the doors are open, the box is little more than a shell and is, as the magician points out, undeniably empty.

After a committee of spectators has been recruited, a young female assistant makes her entrance, is promptly placed in a hypnotic trance and gently lowered into the open box. Since the girl is taller than the box is long, her head and ankles protrude and, in this position, are locked into pillories or stocks built into the ends of the box. One member of the committee holds the girl's head, another her feet. Reminding everyone that the girl has been in full view throughout, the magician flips the doors closed and he and an assistant proceed to saw the box in half! When the saw has cut through to the platform, two slabs are slid into the freshly cut ends, and the two halves are separated to prove that the girl has, apparently, been cut in half. The magician points out that the girl's head and feet are still in view, are still securely locked in place, *are still firmly held by the committeemen.*

On command, the girl now moves her head and feet. The spectator holding the ankles, however, appears

## OUT OF NOWHERE

skeptical. Very well, the magician will prove the feet are genuine. One of the shoes is slipped off and the girl wiggles her toes. The spectator is still unconvinced. The magician snips off a piece of the stocking and the spectator, at the magician's insistence, tickles the now exposed toe. The foot wiggles vigorously and, in the other half of the box, the girl giggles. The spectator is convinced!

Following this amusing interlude, the halves of the box are reunited, the slabs removed, and the doors thrown open. The girl, amazingly enough, is unharmed, though her arms and legs are *still* securely locked and are still held by the spectators stationed at each end of the box. The girl obeys the command to awake and, after being released, she retrieves her shoe and makes her exit, obviously intact.


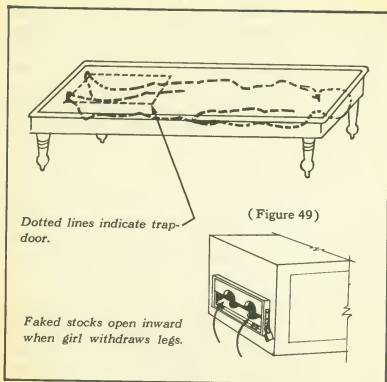
 *Method:* Well, are two girls used? The answer is yes, but like the audiences who flocked to see the trick in the twenties, you'd be hard pressed to explain how. The secret is beautifully thought out and the trick rightfully deserves to be rated as a classic in the art of deception.

Figure 48 shows how the extra girl is concealed within the platform. This concealment is a minor illusion in itself. It's difficult to imagine that so shallow a platform could possibly conceal a full-grown adult. But, the average young woman, if she has been watching her calories, occupies a surprisingly small amount of space. Furthermore, the platform is constructed so as to taper toward the front, thereby creating an optical illusion; it appears thinner than it actually is. In addition to the extra girl, the platform also contains a trapdoor (see

(Figure 48)



dotted lines in the illustration). This opening permits the extra girl to raise her legs quickly and secretly up into the box.

In the beginning the girl enters, is "hypnotized," and is placed in the box. The stocks at each end are "locked" — one securing the neck; the other, the ankles. The stocks used to fasten the ankles are faked. As Figure 49 shows, the girl need simply draw her legs back into the box, and the lower section of the stock, since it is hinged at the bottom and held in place by a weak spring, will open inward, thereby releasing the legs. Of course, this is not done until the proper moment arrives.



## OUT OF NOWHERE

With the girl "locked" in the open box, two members of the committee are assigned to hold her head and feet. The committee is chosen at random with one exception: the member assigned to the job of holding the feet is in the employ of the magician, a confederate.

The doors are closed and, as a final reminder, the platform and box are wheeled around so that the end from which the head protrudes is toward the audience. The magician jangles the locks and points out that the fastenings are secure.

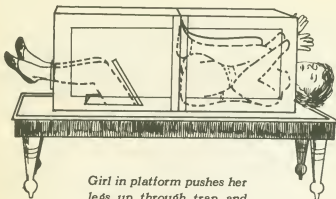
At this moment the lower end of the box is away from the audience and the confederate momentarily releases his hold on the girl's feet. She quickly withdraws her ankles from the faked stocks and the extra girl in the platform, just as quickly, replaces them with her own. It's all done in a twinkling: the platform is turned, there is a momentary pause while the magician flips the locks — and the legs are exchanged. The faked stocks, the speed with which the switch is made, the added safeguard of having a "spectator" hold the ankles — make it all appear innocent and aboveboard.

Now it merely remains for the girl in the box to draw her legs back into a crouching position (Figure 50) while the magician and an assistant labor at sawing the box in half. This done, two slabs are slid into previously established grooves so as to close off the two sections and, finally, the halves are separated as shown in Figure 51.

At this point a diabolical subtlety is added. Supposedly a comedy interlude, it serves to mystify as well as entertain and thereby succeeds in further confusing an already confused audience. The magician removes the girl's right shoe to convince the "skeptical" spec-

(Figure 50)

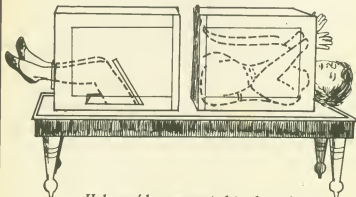
*Girl in box draws legs back.*



*Girl in platform pushes her legs up through trap and slides her feet into the hinged stock.*

(Figure 51)

*Slabs inserted into the freshly cut ends.*



*Halves of box separated to show that girl has—apparently—been cut in half.*

tator that the feet he is guarding are real. Because the spectator is still unconvinced, the magician cuts a piece out of the stocking, the spectator tickles the exposed toe, and the girl in the upper half (on a prearranged signal) giggles. The halves of the box are pushed together, the slabs are removed — *but the magician "forgets" to replace the shoe*. Once again the platform is swung around to show the locks still in place — and again the girls switch feet. This action is the reverse of the original substitution — with one exception: the original girl has, in the meantime, kicked off her right shoe and disposed of it by means of the open trap in the platform. And because the toe of *her* stocking is also missing (it had been cut off before the trick started), it follows that the audience sees nothing amiss after the girls have switched back to the positions occupied at the start.

The locks are unfastened, the doors flipped open, and the girl jumps out. The magician returns the shoe, she slips it on (of course, the audience take note of the toeless stocking), and exits smiling.

The enormous popularity of the "sawing" trick is not entirely explained by audience interest or its ingenious secret. Horace Goldin, the creator of most of the features in the version just described, was a gifted showman and he surrounded the trick with elaborate and amusing publicity.

Pedestrians and motorists, hearing a siren, would look up to see an ambulance go by, bearing a sign explaining that it was on its way to the theater at which Goldin was appearing, "in case the saw slips." In another part of town, a solemn procession of grim-faced pallbearers would file by, in frock coats and high silk hats carrying — instead of their customary burden — a

large, shiny saw. Their destination, as anyone curious enough to follow them discovered, was the stage entrance of the local theater. A sign in the lobby of the theater reading "Standing by — in case the saw slips" explained the presence there of a nurse and stretcher. Contrived newspaper stories told of women challenging Goldin to saw them in half (he always did, of course), and it was common practice for his girl assistant to demand, by way of the newspapers, an increase in her life insurance.

Vaudeville and radio comedians soon joined in with "jokes" such as:

She: If I knew a magician, I'd ask him to saw me in half.

He: Why?

She: I have bunions.

or

He: I'm going to become a magician and hire a tattooed lady for an assistant.

She: Going to saw her in half?

He: No — I'll cut her into a jigsaw puzzle.

And so it went. Whatever the reason, publicity or the trick itself, its memory lingers on.

Magicians didn't start applying crosscut saws to ladies' midsections until the twentieth century, but the idea of cutting and restoring objects goes back into antiquity. The articles used to demonstrate such ability varied, but the overwhelming favorite seems to be rope. So numerous are the methods whereby a rope is severed and restored, however, that they really can't be classified as a single trick. Nor is the effect restricted to the use of rope. String, ribbon, tape, and even a turban have been used.

How old the idea is, no one knows. It wouldn't be surprising to learn it had fooled the pharaohs. There's reason to believe it was ancient back in 1634 when an unknown author, in an early magic book, *Hocus-Pocus, Jr.*, referred to it as "A very strange trick whereby you may seem to cut a piece of tape into parts, and make it whole again with words . . . an excellent trick if gracefully handled."

Since it obviously takes more than words to restore something that has been cut into parts, I am explaining the following method — a modern one — of accomplishing the trick. And because it is intended that the reader perform this trick, it is hoped that he will heed the advice of an unknown ancient, and handle it "gracefully."

## The Cut and Restored String

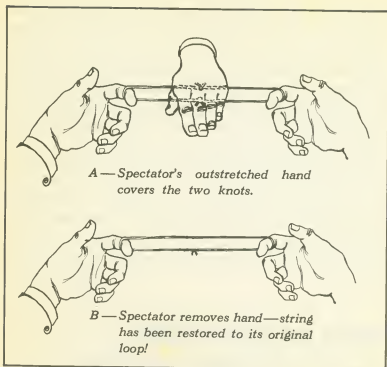
The performer exhibits a piece of string which he forms into a loop by tying its ends together.

"Now first of all," he says, directing attention to the knot just tied, "I want you to keep in mind that we are starting with a loop of string. It's important that you remember that, as well as everything else I do, because I'm going to do the impossible."

One of the onlookers is handed scissors and, as directed by the magician, cuts the string at the center point.

"Because this trick is unbelievable, you may later think you were hypnotized" continues the performer in mock seriousness. "To eliminate that possibility, let's keep some evidence to prove that the string was actually cut." As he says this, the magician snips a short

(Figure 52)



piece from one of the freshly cut ends, and tucks this piece of "evidence" into his pocket. Next, the cut ends are tied. The magician now holds two pieces of string tied together at each end.


A spectator is requested to hold out his hand, palm down. With the knots at the center (Figure 52), the magician moves the string forward until the knots are hidden from view beneath the spectator's hand.

The spectator is instructed to close his hand over the knots for a moment and, when he takes away his hand, it is found that the cut ends, knot and all, are gone. The string has been restored to its original loop, good as new!

## OUT OF NOWHERE

While the spectators examine the now restored string, the magician adds to their perplexity by tossing them the small piece cut out of the string's center earlier in the trick — proof that the string was actually cut.

And so the onlookers are left to ponder a truly baffling trick. The principles involved are ingenious and are put together in such a way as to tax the reasoning power of even the most astute spectator. And yet — it's easy to do.

 *Method:* Preparation is necessary, but you needn't go through it for each performance of the trick; you can make advance preparation for a dozen or more showings of the trick.

The string used is a heavy white variety, the type used for tying packages sent through the mails. Commonly called "parcel-post twine," this string is made up of ten separate strands twisted together to form a single, strong string or cord.

In addition, you will need a roll of that type of transparent plastic tape that is distinguished by its frosty or whitish color. This tape, manufactured by the same firms that make the familiar clear plastic adhesive tape, is available in most stores carrying school and office supplies. If it can't be obtained, you can use white adhesive tape (the kind used for bandages), but the plastic type mentioned is more effective.

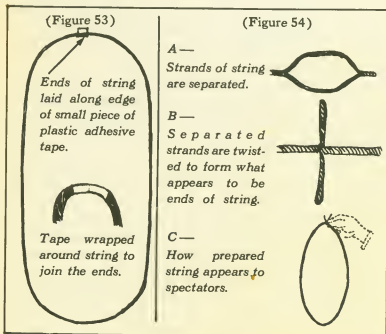
Start with a piece of string about three feet long. Lay the ends — they must be cut sharp and not frayed — along the edge of the adhesive side of the tape, as shown in Figure 53.

The tape must be just long enough to go around the string once with a slight overlap. Press the tape firmly

against the string so as to form a strong, virtually invisible, joint. You will now have what will appear, from a short distance, to be an endless loop of string.

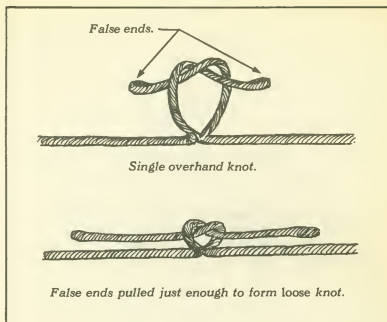
Next, you create artificial, or false, ends at a point in this loop directly opposite the "joint" formed by the two real ends wrapped in the tape. Figure 54 shows how these artificial ends are constructed.

As shown, you first untwist the strands and divide them into two equal groups. Separate these groups and twist each of them to form what appears to be an end of the string. You will find that the strands have a tendency to twirl together almost automatically because of the permanent twist formed when the string was manufactured. Your loop of string will now appear as shown in the last drawing in Figure 54.





(Figure 55)

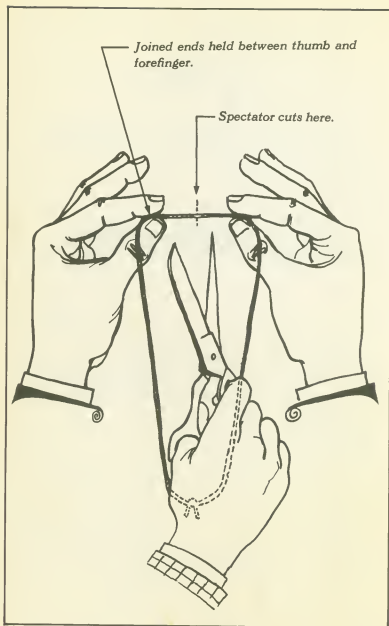


The final step in the preparation is to obtain an extra piece of string, about two inches long. Place this extra piece in your side pocket along with a pair of sharp scissors and you are ready to perform.

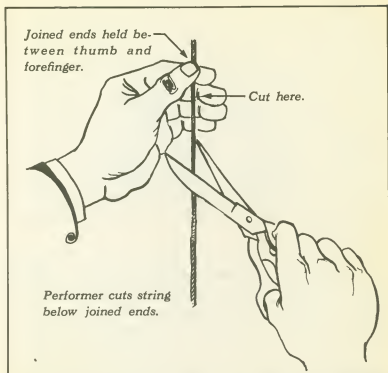
Show the string as in Figure 54 and, as you talk, casually tie the two "ends" together, as follows: first tie a simple overhand knot (Figure 55), but *do not tighten it* — it must be left loose. Next, *pretend* to tie a second overhand knot on top of the first — *but merely go through the motions* — do not really tie this second knot. For reasons which may already be obvious, the "knot" you tie must quickly and effortlessly come undone later when you pull the string taut.

To the spectator, everything is above suspicion: you have simply shown a piece of string and tied its two

(Figure 56)



(Figure 57)



ends together to form a loop, or circle. After handing over the scissors to the spectator, cover the joined section by pinching it between your thumb and forefinger and ask that the string be cut. (See Figure 56.)

The spectator does as directed while you retain your hold on the joint and hand the other end of the string to him. Taking back the scissors, you cut just below the joint (see Figure 57), keeping in mind that this small piece you are now cutting off must be about the same length as the "extra" piece in your pocket. Place both the scissors and the small piece of string in your pocket—the same pocket, of course, that contains the short unprepared piece of string.

What you have done has been to cut away the tell-tale evidence. The ends joined by the tape are now safely hidden in your pocket. What's left is one continuous length, with what appears to be a knot at its center. From the spectators' viewpoint, however, there are *two* pieces of string tied together. It now remains to tie together the two new ends — the ends just cut. In doing this, try to match the first knot as closely as possible.

The finish should be obvious. Request that the spectator hold out his hand and, as shown in Figure 52, bring the string under his palm so as to hide the knots from view.

Once the knots are out of sight, pull firmly on the string. This pressure will cause the single overhand knot to slip out and the disguised "ends" to flatten and resume their original identity as part of the string itself. When this happens (a slight snap will be felt), do not relax the tension; the spot at which the false ends were formed is likely to show a kink. Instead, quickly slide the string between your thumb and forefinger — supposedly to demonstrate that the string is truly restored — but, in reality, to squeeze out any marks left by the false ends.

Remind everyone that you started with a circle of string — that it was cut at the center — and that it is now back to the original circle. As an apparent afterthought, bring out the genuine bit of string from your pocket. Offer this as proof that the string was severed. The piece you really snipped from the string — the one containing the joined ends — is left hidden away in your pocket.

## TIES THAT DO NOT BIND

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**W**hile other magicians appealed to the curiosity of the crowd, Harry Houdini, the escape king, made a stronger, deeper impression. He captured the imagination of people everywhere — and he never let go, really, even after his death.

Much has been written in an attempt to explain his appeal. It has been said he stirred a deep-rooted, age-old human desire to escape from bondage, to be free. Another explanation might be that Houdini was, above all else, a master showman. Good showmen don't usually wait for something to come along to catch the public's interest; they *create* the interest. People of Barnum's day, for example, certainly knew that midgets are small and elephants, large. Nevertheless, when Barnum began to wield his own particular brand of magic, little Tom Thumb emerged a worldwide celebrity, and an overly large elephant named Jumbo became a sensational attraction.

Houdini's audiences sat for hours while the king of

escapes squirmed out of some particularly impossible confinement, such as a riveted iron boiler. People to-day, it is said, are much too impatient for that sort of thing. Probably true. But if it is also true that a forceful showman stimulates interest where previously there was none, who can say how Houdini would be received today? One thing's a certainty: we'd know he was around.

Houdini was not the first nor the last to use the idea of escape from confinement as a form of entertainment, but he was certainly the most successful. No one else even came close. He climbed high, all the way up to that far-off plateau reached only by those who, in their own lifetimes, become legends. As is usual, the Houdini legend is a mixture of truth and myth. Part of the myth is the belief that his "secrets" died with him. The truth is that many of his secrets were not his alone but were originated by others — as, for example, the fascinating stage illusion which left audiences with the impression that Houdini had, literally, strolled through a solid brick wall.

The trick was based on an idea purchased in 1914 from an English magician, S. E. Josolyne. Houdini must have been delighted when it came his way, since it represented a baffling combination of escape and magic. Here's how it appeared to the audience after Houdini, by adding his own touches, had changed it from a trick to a "miracle."

## Walking Through a Wall

The curtains part to reveal a stack of bricks and some bricklaying equipment off to one side. In addition, a steel beam is displayed. This beam, ten feet long by one foot wide, is mounted on castors which raise it a few inches off the stage floor. Houdini enters with a gang of bricklayers who set to work at a furious pace with trowel and mortar. Using the steel beam as a foundation, they are erecting a portable wall. Meanwhile, Houdini rounds up a committee from the audience whose first assignment is to inspect a large thick rug covering the center of the stage. Next they examine an even larger, seamless square of cloth which, in turn, is spread over the rug. The committee is cautioned to be on the lookout for hidden seams or openings. By this time, the energetic bricklayers have completed their task: they have constructed a solid brick wall, one foot thick, ten feet long, eight feet high. Thanks to the castors, this wall is rolled onto the cloth which covers the rug, and is lined up at right angles to the audience, thereby affording most of the audience a good view of both sides.

After placing a couple of three-fold screens against the wall, one on each side, the wall is completely surrounded by the committee who take their places around the outer edges of the cloth covering. Houdini has made no secret of what he means to attempt; he's going to go behind one screen and emerge from behind the other. Considering that the screens are separated by a brick wall, twelve inches thick, this is quite an accomplishment — particularly since the thoroughly

inspected rug and cloth make it impossible for the escape king to go under and since he can't go over or around without the committee — and the audience — seeing him. In short, it's impossible, and therefore just the sort of thing Houdini does best.


And now, after the buildup, the climax. Houdini steps behind one of the screens.

"Here I am," he shouts, waving his arms above the screen. He lowers his arms, the drums roll. There is a pause. Then the cymbals crash.

"And now I'm over here." This time the voice comes from behind the screen on the opposite side of the wall and the smiling escape artist steps from behind the second screen to bow to a stunned audience.

At this point, the committee needs no invitation or urging to inspect the cloth covering, the rug, and the wall. There are no clues. This leaves only the bizarre conclusion that, somehow, Houdini has walked through a solid brick wall.

It was tricks like this that led many spiritualists to the conclusion that Houdini was not really a magician. They made the startling claim that he had the power to dematerialize, or dissolve, his body, but that he wouldn't admit to it. Since a cloak of modesty was never part of Houdini's wardrobe, the spiritualists never explained why this master publicist should have kept such a decidedly remarkable talent to himself.

 *Method:* The secret has nothing to do with dissolving bodies or any such nonsense. It was a trick, pure and simple. The solution is not unlike the solution to those mystery stories in which author catches reader off guard by having the most likely suspect commit the



crime. All along, Houdini emphasized that the rug and outer cloth eliminated the possibility of a trapdoor in the stage. By implication, he was saying that without openings in the rug or in the cloth, a trapdoor couldn't be used. And so, our most likely suspect, the trapdoor, was eliminated. With that possibility gone, what's left? He can't go over or around — we're stumped!

But let's take another look. Is the use of a trapdoor really eliminated? Suppose there is such a trapdoor in the center of a room and it is covered by a heavy rug. If someone in the room below opens the door downward, we probably wouldn't notice anything, provided the rug is large and the trap small. Of course, if we were to step on that portion of the rug directly over the open trap, we'd go down — and probably pull the rug with us. If, however, the corners of the rug are held down by heavy furniture, the section over the open trap would just sag a bit under our weight. And there we have the explanation of how Houdini got from one side of the wall to the other.

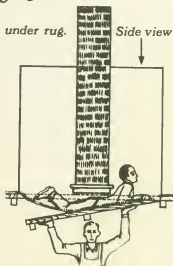
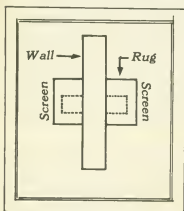
With the rug and outer cloth in place, a below-stage assistant pulled open a trapdoor in the stage and Houdini, an old hand at this sort of thing, took advantage of the slight sag in the rug to squeeze under the wall. True, there wasn't any heavy furniture about to keep the rug and cloth in place, but Houdini had something better: the circle of committeemen standing about the edges.

Figure 58 explains the idea. The moment Houdini stepped behind the screen, the trapdoor was sprung and he quickly slid under the wall at the spot directly over the opening. The weight of the committee kept everything in place and, as Houdini made his trium-

(Figure 58)



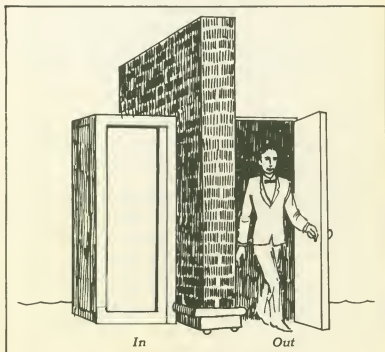
*Dotted lines indicate trapdoor under rug.*



# TIES THAT DO NOT BIND

phant and perplexing reappearance from behind the second screen, the secret door in the stage was quietly closed.

As evidenced by the trick just described, in which Houdini appeared to stroll through a brick wall, so-called "escape" magic need not require the knowledge of a master locksmith, or the slipperiness of an eel. Nor is it necessary to accumulate an arsenal of keys and locks. In fact, here is a stunt of my own devising that calls for nothing more elaborate than a rubber band and a bit of string. Yet it is puzzling and, while easy to do, creates an impression that slick and speedy sleight of hand is responsible.



## String Around the Fingers

The ends of a three-foot length of string are tied to form a loop, or ring. Inserting his first finger into this loop, the magician addresses the spectators:

"As we all know, there's no way of transferring a ring from one finger to another without first taking the ring off the one finger and placing it on the other. For example," he continues, "this string, because its ends are tied together, is actually a large ring. If I place it on my first finger, there's no way of getting it onto one of the other fingers unless I take it off the finger, like this, and place it on another finger."

Suiting the action to the word, the magician openly transfers the loop of string to one of the other fingers.

"Similarly, if I place the loop of string over two of the fingers, I can't get it onto the other two fingers unless I take it off like this, and place it on the other fingers."

Again the magician demonstrates by first placing the string over his first and second fingers and then openly transferring it to his third and little fingers. (See Figure 59.)

Leaving the string hanging over the third and little fingers, the magician proceeds to bind the tips of his fore, middle, third, and little fingers together by encircling them with a rubber band. (See Figure 60.)

"Now," he points out, "it's obviously impossible to get the string off these two fingers without first removing the rubber band. Very well, then, watch."

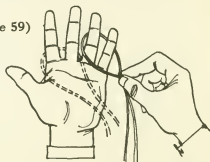
The magician winds the string around his hand, snaps the fingers of his free hand, and, when the string

# TIES THAT DO NOT BIND

is unwound, it is found that the string has transferred from the third and little fingers and is now looped around the first and middle fingers! (See Figure 61.)

The magician removes the rubber band and places the loop of string back on the third and little fingers. Again the rubber band is used to fasten the four fingers together—this time by twisting it in and out of the fingers to make certain that the only exit route available to the string is definitely closed off. Again the string is wound about the hand and again, on unwinding, it is found that the loop has mysteriously hopped from the third and little fingers to the first and second.

(Figure 59)



(Figure 60)




*Ends of fingers  
bound together  
by rubber band.*

(Figure 61)



*String around  
first and second  
fingers after un-  
winding.*

 *Method:* This trick is a fraud from start to finish. It is a good example of how people can be led to believe that something is true when, in reality, it is as false as the beard of a department store Santa Claus.

After tying the ends of the string together, the magician points up the utter impossibility of transferring the loop of string from one finger to another without taking it off the first finger and then putting it on the second.

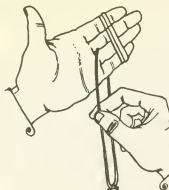
This is so obviously true that it seems ridiculous even to discuss it — but, there's a method to the magician's madness: he is leading the spectators into a trap. He sets this trap by casually explaining the idea; he suggests that if the loop is placed around *two* fingers, it is equally impossible to transfer it to *two other* fingers without first lifting it off the first two fingers. Now, this *isn't* true. It sounds logical, but it just isn't so. If you follow these instructions with a string and a rubber band, you will discover why.

Start by tying a three-foot length of string into a loop. Follow the directions as described until you reach the point at which you have the loop of string over the third and little fingers and the ends of the fingers held together by the rubber band. At this point the trickery takes place. With the fingers of your free hand, grasp the side of the loop nearest you — as shown in Figure 62.

Without pausing, start to wind this part of the loop around your hand by bringing it over the top and around in back of the hand. (See Figure 63.)

Continue around the back and come up under the hand — but as you do so, take along the second part of the loop and continue on around and around the hand

(Figure 62)



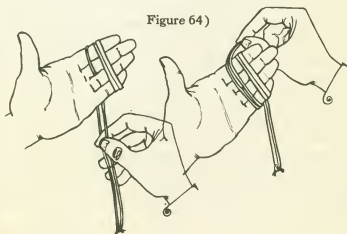
*Right hand grasps  
nearest side of loop.*

(Figure 63)



*Right hand carries its  
side of loop over the  
top of the left hand  
and down in back.*

Figure 64)



*Right hand wraps both sides of loop  
around fingers of left hand.*

until the entire length of the now double string is wrapped about the fingers, close to the knuckles. (See Figure 64.)

This winding of the string around the hand is done casually, but quickly. There must be no hesitation, nothing to attract undue attention. You start with one side of the loop, wind it around the hand once, secretly pick up the second part of the loop on the way around, and continue winding the two parts of the loop until there's none left to wind. It's all done in a second or two — while you're talking to the spectators.

If you now unwind the string, *you will find that it is no longer looped around the third and little fingers.* Should this development puzzle you, go through the winding routine again (it won't do to have the magician fool *himself*) and you will see how the method of winding the loop (one side the first time around — two sides thereafter) automatically transfers the loop from the lower to the upper fingers.

Of course, you could simply unwind the string and show what has happened, but it is more dramatic to hold your arm out from your body and rotate it in short quick circles. This action causes the string to unwind (centrifugal force) thereby revealing that despite the rubber band, the loop of string has changed fingers.

To repeat the trick, *remove the rubber band* and replace the loop of string over the third and little fingers. When you again put the rubber band on the fingers, twist it in and out between them — supposedly to make it doubly difficult to slide the string off the fingers.




## On and Off

I have found that common household objects, since there is little need to prove them innocent of tricky preparation, serve as excellent props in magic. Consequently, I try to devise ways to make the ordinary thing behave in some extraordinary way. The following bit of hocus-pocus is particularly effective and deceptive. All you need is a piece of string, two rubber or metal washers, and a handkerchief.

An ordinary washer is offered to a spectator for examination, and then threaded on a length of string. While this first spectator holds an end of the string in each hand, a second spectator marks the washer with a crayon dot or a pin scratch, for later identification.

The magician now points out the impossibility of removing the washer without releasing the ends of the string. Under cover of a handkerchief, he proceeds to fumble with the washer for a moment and then announces that it has been released from the string. Sure enough, the washer drops from under the handkerchief into the spectator's waiting hand. And this while the ends are securely held!

Needless to say, the string is intact and the identifying marks on the newly liberated washer prove it to be the same one which, a moment earlier, was threaded on the string.

 *Method:* On reading these instructions it will be evident that the trick is not quite as simple and direct as the description just given. Nevertheless, *from the spectator's viewpoint* the trick appears as described. In per-

forming tricks, there is often a gulf between what really takes place and what the spectators *remember* as having taken place. The average person is not too reliable a witness. Trial lawyers will testify to the truth of this — particularly after they have lost a case.

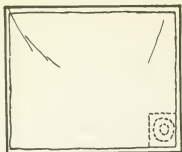
In this trick, for example, the magician confidently announces the release of the washer from the string. He asks the spectator to catch it when it falls. Nothing happens. Investigation by the performer discloses that the announcement was a bit premature. According to the performer, the washer is only "partway" off from the string.

There is some more fumbling under the handkerchief and this time the washer is fully released and drops into the spectator's hand.

While the business about the washer being only partially removed is necessary to make the trick work, as will be explained, it appears to be incidental as far as the spectators are concerned. Accordingly, it is overlooked or forgotten by them.

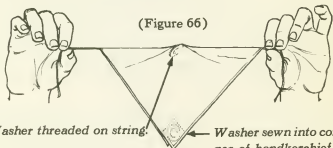
To prepare for the trick, obtain two *identical* washers. The somewhat large flat washers are best. One of these is never seen by the spectators because, as shown in Figure 65, it is hidden away in a small secret pocket in a corner of the handkerchief. This is accomplished by placing one of the washers in a corner of the handkerchief and sewing a small square of cloth over it. This cloth must, of course, match the handkerchief in color and texture. Though this "gimmicked" corner is kept out of sight, it must be neatly constructed so as not to be noticeable at a casual glance. It also follows that a thin washer should be used to avoid a telltale bulge.

With the handkerchief tucked away in your pocket,



(Figure 65)

*Extra washer concealed in pocket in corner of handkerchief.*



(Figure 66)

*Washer threaded on string.*

*Washer sewn into corner of handkerchief.*

show the washer and have it threaded on the string, which should be about three feet long. Have one spectator hold the ends of the string while a second marks (or nicks) the washer for later identification. Remove the handkerchief from your pocket and hold it by the corner containing the extra washer.

Carelessly drape the handkerchief over the exposed washer on the string making certain, as you do so, that the prepared corner hangs down on the side nearest you. (See Figure 66.)

Showing your hands empty, reach under the handkerchief with both hands and, in doing so, secretly bring the prepared corner along underneath and hang it over the string as shown in Figure 67.

With the prepared corner now hanging over the string, grasp the regular washer with the right hand and stare solemnly out over the heads of the onlookers as though you are performing some mystical rite beneath the handkerchief. Everything you have done and said up to this point leads to the assumption that you are, somehow, going to remove the washer from the string and that is what you are supposed to be accomplishing at this moment. In reality, you simply press your left thumb hard against the nail of your right thumb and suddenly let the left thumb slide off the right thumb nail. This action will produce a sort of low snapping sound which the spectators will hear. At this point you smile and, in a triumphant tone, announce that the washer is off the string.

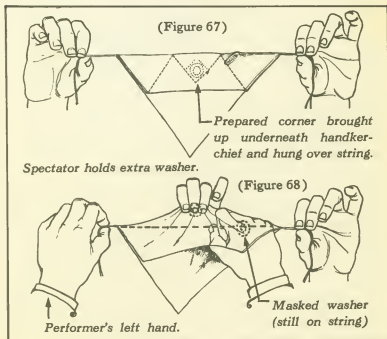
The onlookers have seen you reach under the handkerchief and fumble for a moment, and then they hear a low, peculiar, snapping sound. The point is that your actions, manner, and words suggest that the washer has been released. The snapping sound, in itself, means nothing. It merely leads the spectators to believe that something has happened — that you have somehow managed to get the washer off the string. And that is precisely the impression you want to create, encourage, and use to advantage. Actually, the washer is still threaded on the string, but now that the spectators suspect that it's off, the job of indetectably removing it is greatly simplified.

Here's how it's done: immediately following the snapping sound, slide your empty left hand to the left along the string, and out from under the handkerchief. Nod toward the spectator who has been holding the ends of the string, and say, "Hold the washer for a mo-

# TIES THAT DO NOT BIND

ment—like this.” As you say this, and by way of demonstrating what he is to do, bring your left hand over the top of the handkerchief and grasp the washer from above, through the cloth. What you actually do is take hold of the extra washer, the one concealed in the corner of the handkerchief. The marked washer, the one actually on the string, is still under the handkerchief, held in the cupped fingers of your right hand.

The left hand, having been used to demonstrate how the assisting spectator is to hold the washer, now relieves the spectator of the end of the string so that the spectator’s right hand is free to hold the washer as directed. The situation, at this point, should appear in Figure 68.



The spectator believes that the concealed washer he is now holding through the handkerchief is that which he saw threaded on the string, the one he marked for identification. He also has reason to suspect that this washer may no longer be threaded on the string.

"Don't let go of it yet," you remark. "I want you to catch it as it falls."

With this statement you slide your right hand to the right and along the string. This hand, which is cupped slightly around the string, conceals the washer. The right hand (along with the hidden washer) slides along the string until it is stopped by the *spectator's* left hand which is holding the other end of the string.

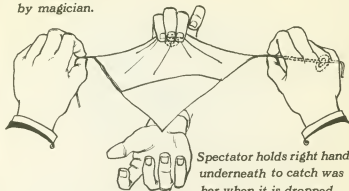
Once more you nod to the spectator and ask that the spectator release the end and hold his left hand under the handkerchief to catch the washer as it falls. And now you hold the end of the string in your right hand (the one containing the concealed washer) while the spectator relinquishes the end of the string held in his left hand and brings this hand down below the handkerchief to catch the washer. (See Figure 69.)

The spectator is now directed to let go of the washer so that it will drop into his waiting left hand. The spectator follows directions, but after letting go — nothing happens. The washer doesn't drop into his waiting hand. Obviously, since the real washer is concealed in your own right hand at the end of the string, the extra washer hidden in the corner of the handkerchief simply hangs over the string after being released by the spectator.

You pretend puzzlement at this "unexpected" development and ask that the spectator again hold the ends of the string while you investigate.

(Figure 69)

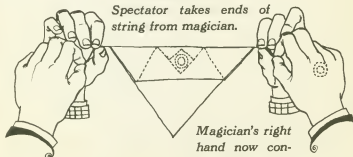
*Ends of string  
are being held  
by magician.*



*Spectator holds right hand  
underneath to catch was  
her when it is dropped.*

(Figure 70)

*Spectator takes ends of  
string from magician.*



*Magician's right  
hand now con-  
tains the re-  
leased washer  
(concealed).*

The spectator complies and since you are holding the string at its very ends, the spectator is obliged to take back these ends by grasping them in *front* of your hands. Because the real washer is concealed in your right hand, this action frees the washer from the string, as shown in Figure 70.

Without pausing — but without hurrying — you again reach up under the handkerchief with *both* hands. This time, of course, the right hand, unknown to the spectators, contains the newly released washer. The under-handkerchief activities, at this point, are the reverse of those originally performed: the “gimmicked” corner is unhooked from the string and allowed to drop down and join the other corners. You fumble for a moment, and then explain that the washer hadn’t been entirely removed. Again you request the spectator to hold the washer from above.

The spectator again reaches over the handkerchief with his right hand, but this time he takes hold of the marked washer, and not its hidden companion. You once more slide your right hand (this time it is empty) along the string and take the end of the string from the spectator, thereby permitting the spectator to hold his left hand below the handkerchief. On this second try, when the spectator releases the washer — it *does* drop into the spectator’s waiting left hand. Casually you place the handkerchief in your pocket and offer the washer and string for examination.

In reading this explanation, the trick may seem to call for some bold sleight of hand, but it’s really easy and your actions are well covered. Visualize the stunt from the viewpoint of the spectator and you’ll realize why the spectator is fooled and why the magician can do what he does without being detected.

It works just as we have described. Try it and you’ll have a trick at your command that ranks with the best.



# THE POWER OF THOUGHT

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**C**ertain universities undertake elaborate and expensive studies in an effort to determine whether one human being can transmit thoughts to another. "Extrasensory perception," they call it.

Old stuff! Our grandparents, and their grandparents before them, clucked with amazement as the magicians of those days demonstrated their ability to read minds and transmit thoughts. "Second sight," people called it.

Truthfully, magicians don't, and never did, read minds or thoughts. Through trickery, however, they manage to convey the impression that to them your mind is an open book. After witnessing the performance of a clever and experienced "mental" (a magician who specializes in "mental" tricks), most people come away convinced that they have been present at a demonstration of genuine mind reading.

This is understandable. The methods used in mental magic are more subtle, perhaps, than those of any of the other branches of conjuring. Then, too, people are

surprisingly quick to accept mind reading as a reality. Let a magician flip a coin into the air and have it come down a poker chip and the onlooker, though he can't explain how the transformation was accomplished, will quite properly view the performance as a trick — and nothing more. However, let the same magician disguise a simple card trick by surrounding it with some razzle-dazzle about thought transference, and an astonishingly high percentage of the onlookers will marvel at the ability of magicians to "read minds."

Realistically, thoughts — like books in the dark — cannot be read. As to whether university studies have or have not established thought transference as a reality — you can choose either side. There are experts at both ends of the argument.

One thing *is* certain: If you have some personal and private bit of information hidden away in the back of your mind — say, your Aunt Minnie's nickname when she was a schoolgirl — you can challenge anyone, anywhere, to tell you what that nickname is with the full assurance that nobody will accept that challenge; unless, of course, you meet up with a mind reader who went to school with Aunt Minnie.

As for magicians, they began using alleged thought transference as a form of entertainment as far back as 1781 when a British conjurer named Philip Breslaw supposedly demonstrated the ability to "communicate the thoughts of any person to another without assistance of speech or writing." Four years later, at London's Royal Haymarket Theatre, magician Joseph Pinetti capitalized on his wife's ability to read minds — a wifely talent to which most husbands will readily testify. According to the advertisements, Madame Pinetti, while

blindfolded, would "... guess at everything imagined or proposed to her by any person in the company."

Sixty years after that, Robert-Houdin, assisted by his son, stirred up considerable interest throughout Europe with a similar, but more advanced, demonstration. In 1850, English-born Robert Heller, using the code system devised by Robert-Houdin as a base, built up a demonstration called "Supernatural Vision" and excited considerable comment in the United States with his apparent ability to transmit thoughts.

These early pioneers performed what later became known as "two-person telepathy." An attraction best suited to large audiences, this form of so-called telepathy is not seen as often now as in the days of vaudeville.



"Two-person telepathy" usually works by an elaborate system of codes. The mentalist wanders about in his audience where he is furnished with names, numbers, or objects. By means of a code, the mentalist manages to enlighten his onstage partner without, it is hoped, the audience realizing that a code is being used. Except for refinements to be touched on later, this code is usually transmitted in the form of questions. The following portions of the code used by Heller, a simple one by later standards, should serve to convey the idea.

# MAGICIAN'S MAGIC

To begin with, Heller and his assistant had to memorize a new and scrambled alphabet. In this alphabet, A meant G; B meant I and so on, as shown below.

A means G	G means D	M means R	S means C
B " I	H " A	N " S	T " B
C " L	I " H	O " M	V " O
D " N	J " P	P " T	W " Q
E " F	K " Y	Q " Z	Y " V
F " E	L " J	R " W	
"Luck" means U			
"See this" " X			
"Pray" " K			

In addition to this mixed-up alphabet, the word "hurry" meant that whatever letter was previously mentioned, was to be repeated.

Let us suppose that Heller was required to code the name "Anna." He would address his "psychic" partner somewhat as follows: "How about telling us this name? Do you think you can?" He would pause a moment, look at his partner, and add, "Hurry now. Have you got it?"

The partner, in turn, would reply along these lines: "I see a name — a beautiful name — it's still blurred — it's something like Annabelle — no, it's shorter. It's Anna!"

As mentioned, the questions clue the word. The stage partner ignores all but the first letter of each sentence. In the example used, you will note that the first letter of each word, when translated according to the scrambled alphabet, gives us the name, "Anna." The word "hurry" was thrown in to indicate that the letter "N" was to be repeated. Here is how the partner translated

#### THE POWER OF THOUGHT

the performer's questions (note the underlined letters):

"How about telling us the name? Do you think you

A

N

can? Hurry now. Have you got it?"

N

A

Numbers were also coded, but by using entire words rather than letters:

- |                           |                           |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| 0 means "quick" or "come" | 6 means "what"            |
| 1 means "say" or "speak"  | 7 means "please"          |
| 2 means "be"              | 8 means "are" or "aren't" |
| 3 means "can" or "can't"  | 9 means "now"             |
| 4 means "do" or "don't"   | 10 means "tell"           |
| 5 means "will" or "won't" |                           |

"Well" means to repeat the last number

Suppose the number to be coded is 1011. The magician might say,

"Tell us this number. Say it slowly. Well, we're waiting."

If you will refer to the first word of each sentence, and relate it to the numerical code list, you will see that the magician's supposedly innocent requests translate into number 1011, as follows:

"Tell" stands for "10"

"Say" stands for "1"

"Well" stands for an additional "1" ("Repeat the last number.")

The big hit of Heller's and similar demonstrations,

however, was the ability of the partner, almost instantaneously, to identify objects shown or handed to the magician. Here again we have a code, but one that is considerably more elaborate. The advance preparation for the demonstrations called for the listing of hundreds of objects which were then divided into groups of ten. Each such group was given a number (Group 1, Group 2, etc.) and was identified by means of a particular phrase ("What is this?" for example, indicated Group 1).

Here is a sample of one such group.

### Group I

Identifying phrase: "What is this?"

- |                 |               |
|-----------------|---------------|
| 1. handkerchief | 6. ring       |
| 2. wristwatch   | 7. beads      |
| 3. bracelet     | 8. earrings   |
| 4. glove        | 9. eyeglasses |
| 5. purse        | 10. pin       |

Let us assume that the performer is handed a bracelet.

"What is this?" the magician asks. This question alerts the partner to the fact that the object must be in Group 1.

"Can you tell us what it is?" Since the word "can" stands for the number 3, the partner now knows that the magician is referring to the *third* object in the *first* group, and having memorized these various objects, she announces that the magician is holding, or touching, a "bracelet."

The almost infinite variety of articles that might be handed to the performer as he meandered through the audience presented a staggering problem to Heller and

other magicians who set themselves up as mental telegraphers. Ever growing categories of objects had to be grouped and memorized: colors, metals, precious stones, fabrics, playing cards, emblems, coins, bills, articles of clothing — the list goes on and on. And the job of translating the codes couldn't be done haltingly, as a child might stammer out the lines of a school play. Questions and their responses had to be fired back and forth with almost machine-gun precision and rapidity.

In time, these code systems, and the techniques of using them, were refined and improved to the point where the results puzzled even those familiar with the basic idea.

Silent codes were developed. Instead of asking, "What is this?" as a means of coding Group 1, the magician would simply rest his hand on the spectator's shoulder; Group 2 might be coded by the magician fingering his tie; Group 3, by putting his hand in his pocket — and so on. To disguise this type of silent code further, the partner or medium would wear a trick blindfold which, as far as obstructing vision, was about as effective as plate glass.

Another refinement was to code in advance. A glance up the aisle often enabled the magician to spot objects that people intended to hand him and he would manage to work the code words for these objects into his introductory remarks. As a result, some objects would be known to the medium even before the actual demonstration had begun. In such situations, the magician would allow the spectators themselves to address the medium — thereby confounding anyone suspecting the use of codes.

In the early 1900's, a man and wife, Alice and Julius

Zancig, developed two-person telepathy to a degree bordering on the uncanny. Year after year they zealously worked at improving and expanding their code systems until their performances often puzzled well-informed magicians. Many an astounded observer, in fact, pondered the possibility that the Zancigs possessed powers that went beyond mortal range. A startling testimony to this effect came from Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the creator, ironically enough, of that master of deductive reasoning, Sherlock Holmes. After witnessing the Zancigs' act, Doyle voluntarily dashed off the following testimonial:

*I have tested Professor and Mrs. Zancig today and am quite assured that their remarkable performance, as I saw it, was due to psychic causes (thought transference) and not to trickery.*

*Signed: Sir Arthur Conan Doyle 4-30-1922*

Because of Doyle's deep and sincere interest in spiritualism (at the time he was the acknowledged leader of that movement), it is understandable that he would search for, and yearn to find, genuine evidence of psychic phenomena, no matter what form that evidence might take. Nevertheless, it seems curiously inconsistent that the author of that gullible testimonial could also be the author of the following dialogue between the immortal Sherlock Holmes and his companion, Dr. Watson:

"So, Watson," said he suddenly, "you do not propose to invest in South African Securities?"

I gave a start of astonishment. Accustomed as I was to



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Holmes' curious faculties, this sudden intrusion into my most intimate thoughts was utterly inexplicable.

"How on earth did you know that?" I asked.

He wheeled round upon his stool, with a steaming test tube in his hand, and a gleam of amusement in his deep-set eyes.

"Now Watson, confess yourself utterly taken aback," said he.

"I am."

"I ought to make you sign a paper to that effect."

"Why?"

"Because in five minutes you will say it is all so absurdly simple."

As is to be expected, Holmes is right. Following Holmes' explanation of how the deduction was arrived at,\* Watson cries:

"How absurdly simple!"

"Quite so," said Holmes a little nettled. "Every problem becomes very childish when once it is explained to you."

We can't help wondering why, on that April day back in 1922, a somewhat "nettled" Sherlock Holmes wasn't stirring in the back of Doyle's mind impatiently demanding of his creator, as he so often did of the bumbling Watson, "Come, come, Sir Arthur! You know my methods, use them." But Doyle, it would seem, didn't practice what Sherlock Holmes preached.

\* Admirers of the great man (Holmes, of course) will already know the thought process by which the master detective deduced, presumably while his back was turned, that Watson had rejected the idea of investing in South African Securities. Others can satisfy their curiosity by reading "The Adventures of the Dancing Men" in *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*.

Back in the early days of the telephone, magicians conceived a simple code intended to convey the idea that the identity of a playing card could be mentally transmitted over great distances. The success of such supposed thought transference was verified by telephone. A spectator would be instructed first to select any card in the pack and then to telephone a friend of the magician. The friend at the other end of the line would promptly and correctly announce the identity of the card just chosen.

Because of the obvious nature of the code used, the trick was more properly a party stunt than an item for magicians or mentalists. The code consisted of assigning a different name to each playing card. The values of the cards were designated by given names; the suits, by surnames. Alfred, for example, meant ace; Bruce, two; Charlie, three—and so on. Brown meant diamonds; Smith, hearts; Jones, clubs; Davis, spades.

The magician spread a pack of cards face down and requested a spectator to select a card freely and turn it face up for all to see. This same spectator would then be asked to telephone the magician's friend. If the card was the Three of Diamonds the spectator would be told to ask for Charlie Brown. On receiving the call, the friend would check his list of code names, would find that Charlie meant three and Brown, diamonds. Friend "Charlie Brown" would then reveal the result of his deciphering to the caller.

Childishly simple to begin with, the trick was finally and mercifully killed off by the wide distribution of the "secret" code to the general public. The idea of using a different name to represent each playing card was explained and reexplained in newspapers, magazines, and advertising throwaways until the secret was about as

well kept as the chemical formula for water.

Although the method for accomplishing this early telephone stunt lacked the necessary degree of subtlety, magicians were intrigued with the possibility of demonstrating two-person telepathy via the telephone. So the magicians set to work and, in time, they turned out enough ways of accomplishing the stunt to fill a good-sized book, methods ranging from simple mathematical formulas to elaborate mechanical contrivances. Then, some years ago, a British magician, Geoffrey Scalbert, contributed a most ingenious principle. The application of the principle was simplified by a New York magic dealer, Louis Tannen; and the present writer added a few touches of his own. The result of these combined efforts is explained in the trick that follows. The reader is urged to entice a friend to assist and to give it a try. It is, I think, as close an approach to actual thought transference as has, so far, been conceived.

## Thoughts from Afar

The magician introduces the subject of thought transference and tells of the arguments, pro and con, about whether one mind can send thoughts to another. The magician then declares that by hard work and self-denial, he and a psychic friend have developed a genuine ability to exchange thoughts, and that he will proceed with a demonstration of this ability which should, once and for all, put an end to the argument.

The magician explains that the psychic friend (or "medium," as I shall call him) lives some distance away and must be reached by telephone. After emphasizing that he will at no time go near the telephone or attempt

to communicate with the medium, the magician requests one of the spectators to call the medium friend and ask for a demonstration of thought transference.


The selected spectator puts through the requested call and the voice at the other end directs that a pack of cards be shuffled and spread face up on a table or on the floor. Next, the unseen medium requests one of the group to touch any one of the face-up cards. All cards other than the one touched are then put away out of sight because, as the medium explains, they represent a disturbing influence.

The freely chosen card now lies face up, alone on the table. We will assume, for the sake of this explanation, that this chosen card is the Five of Clubs.

The medium, by way of the spectator assigned to the telephone, now instructs the magician (who, true to his word, hasn't spoken or gone near the telephone) to obtain paper and pencil. Still following instructions relayed by the spectator, the magician concentrates on the selected card. This concentration apparently succeeds in establishing a mental connection between the magician and the medium because, shortly thereafter, the medium states that the chosen card is black — and instructs the spectator to tell the magician to record this pronouncement on the paper. The magician writes the word "black" and, after further concentration, the medium (still by way of the spectator) instructs him to add the word, "Clubs." The magician does so and, as everyone observes, the medium is 100 per cent correct so far: the card *is* black, and it *is* a Club.

The final piece of information, the value of the card, filters through the ether a bit slower but, after deep meditation, the medium announces that the card is a Five — the Five of Clubs!

The intriguing part of this baffler is that, in actual performance, it appears *exactly* as I have described. And it's such an *honest* trick! The magician gave assurance that he would not say a word to his "psychic" friend, that he would let a spectator do all the talking and that he would stay clear of the phone — that he would not come within whispering distance of it. As it turned out, the magician *didn't* say a word from start to finish, *did* let a spectator place the call and do the talking, and *did* keep his distance. In fact, everything was genuine and fair except for one small deception. Here was no demonstration of thought transference. Here was a trick.

 *Method:* While difficult to believe, the magician *does* communicate with his friend and *does* manage, by means of a devilishly ingenious code, to let his friend know the identity of the chosen card.

Throughout the "demonstration," the sole function of the spectator at the telephone has been, supposedly, to relay information received from the medium. However, this same spectator, without his own or any other spectator's knowledge, has been used by the magician as a means of transmitting the name of the card to the medium. This is where the code comes in. It's a silent code based on the length of the pauses which separate the various actions. A short pause means one thing, a long pause, another. As the medium presses an attentive ear to the receiver, he measures these pauses and, as will be explained, is first advised of the color of the card, then its suit, and finally its value.

Briefly, this is how it works: the medium gives a specific instruction to the spectator who, in turn, passes this instruction on to the magician. The medium "lis-

tens in" as the instruction is relayed and notes the lapse in time before the spectator comes back to him with the announcement that the instruction has been carried out. The code is based on whether this interval is short or long.

To illustrate: at one point the medium requests that the chosen card be removed from the spread and placed aside, in full view. The spectator at the telephone relays this request to the magician. In the meantime, the medium waits, listens, and takes note of the lapse in time before the spectator certifies that the requested action has been carried out.

In this instance — as is explained later when I will go into detail regarding the code — a short wait means the card is red; a long wait, that it is black. Who controls the length of the wait? The magician, of course!

If the card *is* red, the magician makes the interval a short one by simply pulling the chosen card out of the spread, tossing it to one side, and nodding to the spectator at the telephone as an indication that the instruction has been acted on. The spectator, in turn, notifies the medium, and since only a few seconds have passed, the medium knows that the card is red. However, should the card be black, the magician would slow his actions. He wouldn't remove the card as quickly and, once it is removed, would look about for a spot where it could be propped upright for all to see. All in all, there might be a lapse of ten or more seconds before the nod is given to the spectator and the medium advised. Needless to say, this relatively long pause would tell the medium that the card is black.

By issuing six separate instructions, and recording short or long pauses after each, the medium will have accumulated all the information needed to acquaint

# THE POWER OF THOUGHT

him with the name of the chosen card. The medium's job is easy. He follows written instructions (see Figure 71), and asks questions that are written out for him, and checks off the appropriate replies (he keeps a record of the long and short pauses). When finished, the information he has checked spells out the name of the selected card.

The magician's job is a bit more difficult since he must memorize the code. As will be seen, however, this code is a simple one and contains nothing that should strain anyone's thinking apparatus.

The medium's instructions, which contain the code, are as follows:

Figure 71

INSTRUCTIONS	SHORT	LONG
	PAUSE	PAUSE
A: "Tell the magician to remove the chosen card from the spread and place it where everyone can see it."	Red	Black
B: "Tell the magician to gather the cards and put them away out of sight—they're a disturbing influence."	Diamond or Spade	Heart or Club
C: "Does the magician have paper and pencil handy?"	1	0
D: "Tell the magician to concentrate on the card."	2	0
E: "Tell the magician to write the word (red or black)." (See "A.")	4	0
F: "Tell the magician to write the word (give correct suit)." (See "B.")	6	0
"Now tell the magician to write the value of card (add C, D, E, F)"		

In actual performance, here's what happens:

The medium, upon receiving a telephone call requesting a "psychic" demonstration, proceeds to instruct the spectator. First, the medium asks, "Do you have a pack of cards handy?"

When the spectator replies in the affirmative, the medium continues, "Have the cards shuffled — and let me know when this has been done."

Note that the medium is establishing a pattern to be followed later when the coding begins: after each instruction, the medium requests that he be told when the instruction has been carried out. This seems natural and understandable since the medium can't see what's going on.

When advised that the shuffling has been completed, the medium issues the next instruction, "Have the cards spread face up so that all the cards are showing — and let me know when this has been done."

The magician lends a hand at this point by spreading the cards along a table, after which he nods to the spectator as a means of indicating that the instruction has been acted on. The spectator, in turn, advises the medium who continues, "Have one of the spectators touch one of the cards. Tell him to take his time and to make certain that he is not influenced in any way — that he has a completely free choice."

One of the spectators looks the cards over and touches one. There's nothing secretive about this. Everyone present, including the magician, can see the card that has been touched.

Once the card has been decided on, the magician who has assumed the role of a silent master of ceremonies, nods to the spectator at the phone, who then



asks the medium for further instructions. The medium, at this point, refers to the instruction sheet for the first time and gets his pencil ready. *The coding is about to begin.* He continues by reading from the instruction sheet, starting with "A": "Tell the magician to remove the chosen card from the spread and place it where everyone can see it."

As has been explained, the length of time it takes for the magician to carry out this instruction will advise the medium as to whether the card is red or black. The manner in which the magician can shorten or lengthen this interval has also been explained. If the interval is short, the medium places a pencil check next to "A," in the column marked "short pause." In other words, the medium checks the color "red." If the pause is long, the medium checks "black."

The medium next refers to "B" on the instruction sheet and advises the spectator at the telephone to, "Tell the magician to gather the cards and put them away out of sight — they're a disturbing influence."

As is shown in the instruction sheet, a short pause following this instruction ("B") will indicate that the card is either a Diamond or Spade. A long pause means it is a Heart or Club.

The magician can produce a short pause by simply scooping up the cards and dropping them in his pocket. If a long pause is in order, the magician first feels around in his pockets for the card case and carefully, *and not too quickly*, places the cards in the case and closes its flap. The case is then tucked away in the magician's inside pocket, an action which should eat up a few more seconds.

If you will review the codes you will see that a com-

bination of the replies (long or short pauses) to items A and B will tell the medium the suit of the selected card. To illustrate: if "A" shows that the card is red — and "B" shows that it is a Diamond or a Spade, the correct suit must be a Diamond (red).

The replies to the remaining four items (C, D, E, F) when added together, will tell the medium the value of the selected card.

The medium continues by reading off item C, which is in the form of a question asking whether the magician has a paper and pencil handy. If the answer comes back after only a short pause, the medium places a check next to number 1. If the pause is a long one, the medium checks the zero.

Items D, E, and F are handled in the same manner. At the finish, the medium *totals* all the *numbers* that have been checked and thus arrives at the value of the chosen card. Figure 72 shows how the medium's instruction sheet will look at the completion of the demonstration.

In this example, the card is the Five of Clubs.

Figure 72

SHORT PAUSE Red	LONG PAUSE Black ✓
Diamond or Spade	Heart or ✓ Club
1 ✓	0
2	0 ✓
4 ✓	0
6	0 ✓

Jacks are valued as eleven; Queens, twelve; Kings, thirteen.

If you review the numbers used in this code system (1-2-4-6), you will realize that the value of any card can be worked out by using the proper combination.

The magician, of course, must memorize the codes since, unlike the medium, he doesn't have the advantage of privacy in which to refer to an instruction sheet. It's easy, but if you are inclined to be forgetful you can fashion a mental crutch by scratching the four digits on the side of your pencil as a reminder.

As for the details of creating long or short pauses for "C" through "F," it's a simple matter to work out methods that best suit your own personality and characteristics. When, for example, you are asked to obtain paper and pencil, you can either reach into your pocket and there they are—or, you can fumble in the pocket, finally find the paper, fumble some more, and eventually locate the pencil.

The request to concentrate on the card ("D") calls for a similar approach. You can either glance at the card for a second or two and then nod to the spectator at the telephone (short pause) or, to create a *long* pause, you can lean forward close to the card, hold it before your eyes, gaze at it solemnly for three or four seconds, carefully (and *slowly*) place it back in its original location, and *then* nod to the spectator.

When the medium announces the color of the card and asks that you write it on the paper ("E"), you either quickly dash off the color given you by the medium (short pause) or you smile in amazement at the medium's remarkable talents, pick up the pencil, adjust the paper in front of you, and carefully write out

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the word (long pause). The same approach applies to item "F" when you are asked to write the suit of the card.

As for the medium's part in this drama, just make certain that he (or she) doesn't rush matters. After each item is checked, the medium should wait a few seconds before proceeding to the next.

# OF THINGS TO COME

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**T**o see through and beyond the veil that hides the future — *there's* a dream that has fascinated man through the ages!

Scientists, even in their most ambitious plans for the future, don't foresee a day when that veil will be lifted, or even momentarily parted. There will always, say the scientists, be an impenetrable separation between one moment and the next, one day and another. And yet, to magicians, this same veil might just as well be so much transparent cheesecloth — or so it seems at least when they blithely, and with unerring accuracy, record happenings that are yet to happen.

It all comes under the heading of a subsection of magic called "predictions" and may involve anything from a forecast of next week's headlines to the identity of playing cards yet to be selected.

Technically, magicians are not the only prognosticators around, but if accuracy counts, they have the field pretty much to themselves. Weathermen and public opinion pollsters do attempt to predict the outcome

of certain events, but only after cautiously emphasizing that their forecasts hinge on the continuance of existing trends, the absence of unforeseen developments. And when — as has happened — a prediction of "snow flurries" precedes a blizzard that paralyzes part of a nation, when an overwhelming favorite in a major election emerges as the victim of a stunning defeat — we are inclined to conclude that the only *sure* way of viewing the future is to wait until it becomes the present.

In one form or another, foretellers of the future have always been with us. And whether the secrets of the future are revealed to these self-styled prophets by way of the stars or the soggy leaves at the bottom of a teacup, their prognostications are usually as accurate as would have been obtained had we torn up the horoscope, washed out the teacup, and tossed a coin instead.

As a group, gypsies seem to have taken and held the lead in sustained identity with the subject. For centuries, gypsy fortune-tellers have claimed the ability to foretell coming events, a claim not usually recognized by ever skeptical law enforcement officials. The frequency with which gypsies are nabbed in the act of surveying the future would seem to raise doubts concerning the clarity of their foresight. Certainly, if a crystal ball fails to pick up the image of a policeman coming around the corner to arrest its owner, logic would dictate that the owner should shop around for a new crystal, or a new profession. Invariably, the police insist on the latter alternative.

The future is as elusive to magicians as it is to anyone else, of course, but they have developed any number of ingenious tricks which make it seem that the opposite is true. Because most of the methods used to

accomplish such tricks require equipment, knowledge, or skill that extends beyond the scope of this book, I have put together the following stunt which, while baffling and entertaining, requires no particular skill and no equipment other than an ordinary pack of cards and three blank business cards. I call it:

## Three Cards in the Future

After a pack of cards is shuffled by a spectator and shown to be well mixed, the magician shows three blank business cards and writes a "prediction" on each. Without revealing what he has written, the magician then places the business cards in a row on a table, with the written sides down.


Under the direction of the magician, the spectator deals the playing cards into three piles, one pile in front of each of the business cards. The dealing of the playing cards is completely under the spectator's control. The spectator stops dealing onto the first pile and starts the second pile whenever it pleases him to do so. After the first two piles have been dealt, the balance of the pack is used to make up the third pile.

Now, the climax! The business cards are turned over to reveal the predictions. Each business card bears the name of a different card. The three piles of playing cards are turned face up and it is found that the bottom card of each pile has been accurately predicted on its related business card.

The magician, despite the fairness of the shuffle and the freedom of the deal, has succeeded in predicting

the random selection of three cards!

Oh yes, the magician did make one slight error. As proof that the future is a bit hazy even to the best of us, the magician failed to foretell the correct suit of one of the cards. He was right about its value and color, however.

 *Method:* Aside from the pack of cards, which may be borrowed, all you need for this truly startling prediction trick are three blank business cards, or three cards of a comparable size and thickness. Anything other than thin paper will do. The stock used for index cards is ideal. One tiny bit of preparation is necessary: in pencil or ink (whichever you intend to use when performing this trick) draw some lines across the center of one of the business cards, just as you would do if you were crossing out an error. The card, at this point, should appear as in Figure 73.

(Figure 73)



With the card on which you have drawn these lines on the outside, tuck the business cards in your pocket or wallet, and you are ready to demonstrate your ability to see into the future.



Start by having a spectator shuffle the cards to his heart's content. Take the pack from him and, by way of demonstrating that the cards are well mixed, fan them face up for all to see.

The fanning of the cards to show their haphazard order, is really a pretext. You do it solely to acquaint yourself with the identity of the *top* and *bottom* cards. When I refer to the "top" card, I mean the card that is uppermost in a face-down pack. Similarly, the lowermost card in a face-down pack is the "bottom" card.

To simplify this explanation, we will assume the top card to be the Ace of Spades, and the bottom card (the card at the face of the pack), the King of Diamonds.

Having satisfied the onlookers that the cards are truly mixed, and having satisfied yourself that you now know the identity of the top and bottom cards, close the fan, place the pack aside face down, and bring out the three business cards.

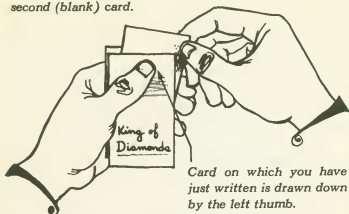
Show the business cards casually making certain that you don't reveal the lines that you have drawn on the top card of the three.

With a pencil in your right hand and the business cards in your left (the card containing the lines is facing you), step back and, directly *below* the scratch marks, write the name of the card that is on the bottom of the pack. In the example we are using, this would be the King of Diamonds.

Following this first "prediction," the card on which you have just written is drawn down with your left thumb while your right thumb slides out the card underneath and places it, written side down, on the table. In reality, the card now on the table is blank although the spectators assume it to be the card on which you

(Figure 74)

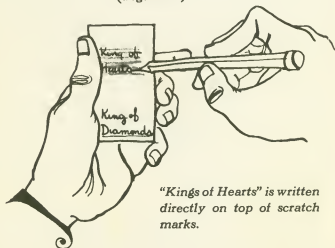
*Right thumb slides out the  
second (blank) card.*



*Card on which you have  
just written is drawn down  
by the left thumb.*

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(Figure 75)



*"Kings of Hearts" is written  
directly on top of scratch  
marks.*

have just written. This switch of the top card for the card directly below it, is simple. Figure 74 shows how it is accomplished.

Next, concentrate a bit, and then, directly on *top* of the lines (see Figure 75) write the name of the card that most closely matches the card you have just written.

For example, you have written "King of Diamonds" below the lines. The card that most closely matches the King of Diamonds is the King of Hearts (same color, same value). Therefore, you now write, "King of Hearts" right on *top* of the lines as shown in Figure 75.

The example we are using happens to involve the two red kings. However, all playing cards can be similarly matched. Example: Ace of Diamonds, Ace of Hearts; Five of Clubs, Five of Spades; and so on.

This second business card which, unknown to the spectators, shows the names of two cards (one of which is partially scratched out) is then placed, written side down, about ten inches to the right of the first business card.

The handling of the third and last business card is comparatively simple and uncomplicated. On it you simply write the name of the top playing card of the pack, in this case the Ace of Spades. This third and last card is then placed to the right of the two cards already on the table.

Up to now, the spectators have seen a pack of cards shuffled and have watched as you wrote something on each of three business cards. In each instance, the writing was hidden from the spectators and the business cards were placed blank sides up in a row on the table.

In reality, the first, or leftmost, business card, contains no writing; it is blank on both sides.

The second, or middle, business card bears the names of two cards: "King of Hearts," which is crossed out, and a bit lower, the "King of Diamonds." The last card on the right reads, "Ace of Spades."

Now, back to the shuffled pack of playing cards. Ask one of the spectators to hold the pack face down and to deal the cards, one at a time, into a face-down pile, directly in front of the *last* business card placed on the table, the card at the extreme *right*, the one on which the prediction, "Ace of Spades," appears.

Advise the spectator that he can stop dealing at any time it pleases him to do so, but suggest that he not go too far beyond a third of the pack since there are two more piles to come.

After the spectator has completed the dealing of the first pile, point to a spot directly in front of the middle business card and request that he continue the deal, but that he start a second pile in front of this middle card. Again caution him not to deal too many cards since a third pile is needed.

Again the spectator deals, this time to form the second pile. When he has decided to stop dealing cards onto this second pile, casually request the spectator to place the remainder of the pack, face down, in front of the last of the three "prediction" cards.

Before continuing, let's review the makeup of the three piles of cards the spectator has just dealt.

You started with a face-down shuffled pack, the top card of which you knew was the Ace of Spades, just as you knew the bottom card to be the King of Diamonds. You asked the spectator to deal approximately one

third of the pack face down in front of the business card at the extreme right, the card on which you had written, "Ace of Spades."

Because the playing cards were dealt singly, it follows that the first card dealt onto the table was the Ace of Spades. The balance of the cards that make up this first pile were, in turn, dealt on top of the face-down ace. The Ace of Spades, then, is the bottom card of the first pile.

After the spectator had decided that a sufficient number of cards have been dealt on the first pile, you directed him to begin a second pile, this one in front of the middle business card. The spectator did as directed, and continued to deal cards until about another third of the pack had been exhausted.

Up to now, you haven't the faintest notion of the identity of the card at the bottom of this second pile. You do know, however, that the business card associated with this second pile bears the names of the two red kings, one of which (the King of Hearts) appears to be crossed out. We'll come back to this later.

The third and last pile, unlike its predecessors, wasn't dealt card by card. You simply told the spectator to drop the balance of the pack in front of the last of the three business cards.

Because the King of Diamonds was on the bottom of the pack to start with, this same king, quite naturally, is now the bottom card of this last pile. The business card associated with this pile, incidentally, is the one on which no prediction appears, the one that was left blank.

Now, here is where the skulduggery takes place. After briefly reviewing what has happened so far, you

mention that you wish to check the accuracy of your predictions. First, you pick up the business card at the extreme right, the one on which "Ace of Spades" is written. Without showing your prediction, you hold the card written side toward you in your left hand while, with your right hand, you lift the first pile and glance at its bottom card (Ace of Spades). After comparing your prediction with this bottom card, you smile confidently and say, "Well, I got the first one right." Still without showing either the prediction or the bottom card, you replace the first pile, retain the business card in your left hand, and proceed to the second, or middle, pile where you repeat the procedure: first you take the business card in your left hand (you place it facing you on top of the first business card) and peek at the card at the bottom of the middle pile. Again you comment on your accuracy, this time with respect to your second prediction.

Although you imply that you have correctly predicted the bottom card of the middle pile, such is not the case. The business card now facing you predicts the red kings, one prediction crossed out. However, you have now succeeded in learning the identity of the lowermost card of the middle pile. The problem now is to get the name of that card written onto the blank business card. How? The business with the red kings and the lines provide the necessary camouflage.

Again making certain that the spectators see neither the bottom card of the pile — nor your prediction — you go on to the third business card which you pick up and add to the two business cards already in your left hand. Once again, supposedly by way of verifying your prediction, you pretend to compare the bottom card of

this last pile with the prediction on the third and last business card (it's really blank).

This time your confidence is visibly shaken. You explain that a mistake has been made.

Feigning embarrassment, you reach for your pencil and pretend to draw some lines through your supposedly incorrect prediction. In reality, your pencil doesn't touch the surface of this blank card, but your fingernail does, however, and serves to simulate the sound that would be made if you were actually crossing out an error on the card.

Remarking that a slight correction is necessary, you now boldly proceed to write the name of the card which, as you have learned, is at the bottom of the *middle* pile. Of course, you don't allow anyone to see what you are writing.

Apparently disappointed at your inability to achieve complete accuracy, you toss the pencil on the table. "I can't understand it. I never miss these things," you remark. Then taking the first business card (the one bearing the "Ace of Spades" prediction) in your right hand you turn it written side up in front of the first pile. Following this, you turn that pile face up to reveal that its bottom card is the Ace of Spades. "See," you add, "I predicted the *first* card correctly."

With attention centered in this development, you casually take the "second" business card in your right hand with the remark, "And I was right about the *second* card, too." In reality, as the fingers of the right hand momentarily hide the two business cards held in the left hand, the right hand comes away with the *third* business card, the one on which you have just pretended to make a correction.

Without pausing, you add, "See, here's my prediction for the *second* card," as you turn over the business card now held in your right hand. "And here's the card on the bottom of the center pile"; you turn up the center pile to show that the card matches the prediction.

"But," you continue somewhat sadly, "I blundered on this third card. As you can see, I predicted the King of *Hearts*, but the card is the King of *Diamonds*." As you say this, you turn over the business card to show how the King of Hearts had to be crossed out and changed to the King of Diamonds. The trick is finished when you turn up the last of the face-down piles to show the King of Diamonds at its bottom.

As to your "error," the spectators will realize that you are exaggerating its magnitude. To forecast the names of three playing cards and to miss out only to the extent of getting a heart mixed with a diamond, is topnotch prognostication by anybody's standards.

When analyzed, the trick narrows down to a "force" of two cards and some behind-the-scenes maneuvering, first to learn the identity of the unforced card and then to get the name of that card written on the blank business card without making it obvious that you are doing just that.

Admittedly, the method of forcing the two cards seems obvious and brazen. However, it's surprising how the average spectator overlooks the obvious solutions to problems such as this. And even if doubts should crop up, your successful prediction of the card at the bottom of the center pile is a hard one to fathom.



# THE QUICK AND THE DEAD

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**T**he somber possibility of direct two-way communication between the living and the dead is a subject far removed from the pleasant, fanciful world of the magician. And so it would have remained had not fraudulent spirit mediums invaded the magician's realm and used their trickery, not to amuse or entertain, but to capitalize on the grief and misery of those who would pay any price to communicate with departed loved ones.

The resistance of magicians to this invasion and the leading role they played in publicly exposing the shoddy practices of the fake medium represents one of the finest, brightest chapters in the long history of magic. In the sixteenth century, Reginald Scott, in his book *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* had used the tricks of the conjurer as a means of combating the ignorance of his time and thereby succeeded in hastening the end of the universal belief in human "divils." Now, almost three centuries later, the magicians themselves carried the same torch, this time to throw light on the dark practices of the séance room.

Spiritualism, at least the version that spread throughout the world in the second half of the nineteenth century, started in 1848 near Hydesville, New York, in a farmhouse occupied by a family named Fox. In that year, two youngsters in the family, Katie and Margaret, suddenly developed an almost magnetic attraction for a host of frolicsome spirits who were constantly knocking things about or rapping on walls and floors.

As was later revealed, the two youngsters were having a giggling good time over the reactions of their highly superstitious mother to such stunts as attaching a long string to an apple so that, while the innocent little darlings were supposedly fast asleep, they could cause "ghostly thumpings" by jerking the apple along the floor.

That this and other "mysterious" occurrences might be nothing more than childish pranks never occurred to the mother who scurried about, telling equally superstitious townsfolk of the strange goings-on at the farmhouse. The word got around and, by the time the pranksters had reached their teens, they had become firmly established legends in their own and surrounding communities. Under the management of a crafty older sister, the girls turned their reputations into cash by conducting spirit séances, first locally and later nationally. These séances consisted of a half a dozen or so "sitters" (paying customers) who would seat themselves about a circular table in a darkened room and, after the sisters had established contact with the other world, would have questions answered by whatever obliging spirit happened to be passing over the neighborhood at the time.

The answers, at least in these earlier séances, took

the form of raps: one rap meant "no"; two raps meant "doubtful"; three raps meant "yes."

In later years, Margaret Fox saw the error of her ways and toured the country explaining and demonstrating the tricks she and her sister Katie had devised to befuddle first their mother and, later, the public at large. One of Margaret's more fascinating revelations was that, while they were still young girls, the sisters had developed the ability to snap their toes in much the same manner as other youngsters were learning to snap their fingers. At first, this somewhat unusual talent was merely one in a long succession of jokes used to confuse Mama. Deadened by blankets, the low snapping sounds, emerging from somewhere in the darkened bedroom of the "sleeping" girls, simply represented, to their poor tormented mother, additional evidence of mysterious forces at work. Later in life, the sisters used these sounds, now muffled by the roomy shoes they wore, as one means of producing "spirit" raps during their séances.

Financially, Margaret's tour was a failure and, finding that there was no money in repenting, she went back to her spirits. By this time, spiritualism had spread over the United States and Europe. Surprisingly large numbers of individuals were discovering that they too had "psychic" powers. Such discoveries usually came hard on the heels of the realization that people were willing to pay handsome fees for the privilege of sitting in the dark, listening to ghostly answers being rapped out by human knuckles, or gazing in awe at spirits returned to earth — spirits which, if viewed in the light, would bear a striking resemblance to phosphorus-coated gauze at the end of a stick.

Within a few years after the Fox Sisters had begun their shenanigans, their fame had spread to Buffalo, New York, where a retired police officer named Davenport reasoned that if a couple of farm girls could raise such a profitable fuss, his own sons, Ira and William — young, keen and energetic — should be able to do as well, possibly better. It is no coincidence that immediately after this idea occurred to the elder Davenport, his home was invaded by the same brand of noisy spirits as was raising such a rumpus over at the Fox farmhouse. The pattern was the same: thumpings, bumpings, tappings and, finally, the money-making séances.

Although the two Davenport boys were now bringing in considerably more money than they had been earning in their previous occupation as street-corner newsboys, they and their father were a bit saddened by the limits placed on their newfound income. After all, how many gullible individuals *could* be crowded around one table? How, they wondered, could a spirit séance be performed in an auditorium or theater?

And so, instead of sitting around every day waiting for it to get dark, the boys set to work and, under their father's guidance, developed a remarkable act that was destined to become a topic of stormy controversy on two continents for many years to come.

The Davenports' idea had all the simplicity of Mohammed and his mountain. If they couldn't get large audiences in the séance room, they would take the séance room to the large audiences. In keeping with this idea, the Davenports built themselves an odd-looking, bulky three-door cabinet about six feet high, eight feet wide, and just deep enough for the boys to seat

themselves on the benches constructed inside the cabinet at each end. The back, sides, top, and bottom of the cabinet were solid, while the front, except for two narrow uprights, was made of three doors. When the doors were open, the entire inside of the cabinet was revealed. With the doors closed, the cabinet became what the Davenports intended it to be: a portable version of a dark séance room with its only opening, a small diamond-shaped window in the middle door, closed off by an opaque curtain.

Convinced that a traveling spook show was just the thing to enable them to capitalize on the public's growing interest in spiritualism, the Davenports set to work to develop an act that would not only hold the attention of large audiences, but would also be sufficiently deceptive to confuse the skeptics.

The "psychic demonstration" planned by the Davenports would call for rope — yards and yards of it. The brothers would be bound hand and foot and placed in the cabinet along with some musical instruments. As soon as the doors were closed, strange things would happen. Hands would appear at the window, the musical instruments would play, doors would fly open — and so on.

The Davenports reasoned that the public would be hard put to understand these and other weird goings-on within the cabinet if its only occupants — the two brothers — were tied like packages ready for mailing, scarcely able to move a muscle, much less (perish the thought) to lend a helping earthly hand to the un-earthly activities. Anticipating that logical-thinking individuals would question why the brothers, helpless or

not, had to be in the cabinet to begin with, the Davenports decided to justify their presence by explaining that they had to be there to attract the spirits.

Ridiculous? The Davenports didn't think so. Keen students of human gullibility, they had learned from the reactions to the séances conducted in the parlor of their Buffalo home that people were inclined to brush common sense aside whenever it blocked the way to a desperately desired belief.

So, after long and careful practice and planning, the Davenports laid in a good supply of rope, polished their cabinet, and, with the worst of intentions, put the act on the road. The year was 1855. For the next eighteen years they were to travel over most of the United States, Canada, and Europe, leaving behind them a wake of frothy controversy. Their performances were always well attended, the reason being that both believers and nonbelievers alike turned out in force. But whether audiences cheered or jeered or, as usually happened, did both—the Davenports remained serenely aloof. To them all spectators, friend and foe alike, possessed a charming similarity: each paid the price of admission.

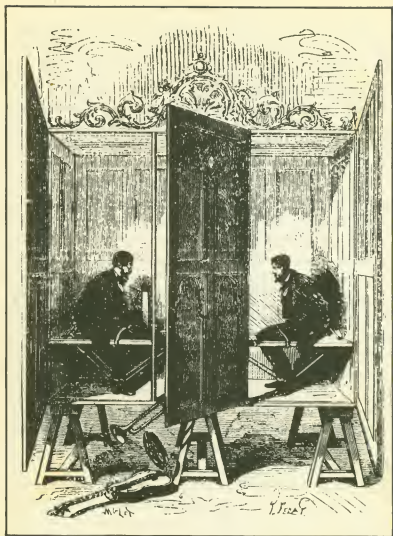
As I read over the newspaper accounts of the Davenports' performances, my sympathies go out to the disbelievers, those who were certain that the whole thing was a fraud, but were frustrated by their inability to explain how the brothers managed to do what they did. For these Davenport boys were no run-of-the-mill carnival tricksters. On the contrary, no less an authority than Harry Houdini, a half-century later, in October, 1907, classified them in *The Conjurers' Magazine*, as "the most dramatic figures in the nineteenth-century history of magic." Houdini conceded that others showed

more ingenuity but added, "It remained for the Davenports to stir up two continents and to create wherever they appeared, riots of disapproval or tempests of applause. Societies wrangled over them, scientists gave them profound consideration, and the press devoted not columns, but whole pages to exposing their tricks or the tirades of their champions. They were the most talked-of performers of their day."

Because the Civil War had curtailed theatrical activity in the United States, the Davenport Brothers, in 1864, took off for England where they were destined to create a sensation or, as the magazine *Punch* punned, "a tie-fuss fever." By this time, the "boys" had grown to young manhood and had developed into impressive stage figures with their fashionably long black wavy hair, their neatly trimmed moustaches and Vandyke beards, and their disarming butter-won't-melt-in-our-mouths manner. To round out the picture, their father, who had been serving as lecturer during the performances, dropped out of the act and was replaced by an elderly ex-preacher, a Dr. J. B. Ferguson, whose silvery tones and sanctimonious air added a pious note to the proceedings.

The following is a concise eyewitness account of their first performance in England, which was given before a select audience of scientists and newsmen. The performance took place on September 28, 1864. This account of it appeared in *The Morning Post*. After describing the cabinet, the account continues:

The Brothers Davenport having seated themselves vis-a-vis on the end bench, their hands and feet were securely tied by those present, so as to prevent the possibility of them using those members. A guitar, a tamborine, a violin



*The Davenport Brothers in their famous cabinet.*



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and bow, a brass horn, and a couple of bells were placed on the seat inside, and the doors were shut. At the top of the panel of the center door was a diamond-shaped opening about a foot square, with a curtain secured on the inside. Instantly on the center door being closed the bolt was secured inside, and hands were clearly observed through the opening.

A gentleman present was invited to pass his hand through the opening, and it was touched by the hands several times. The musical instruments and the bells then commenced making all sorts of noises and knockings, snatches of airs were distinctly heard, and suddenly the center door was burst open, and the trumpet was thrown out into the room and fell heavily upon the carpet. The doors were subsequently closed by persons who, when doing so, were touched by invisible hands. A moment or two afterwards the brothers were found sitting unbound, with the ropes at their feet. The next illustration was more curious still, for, after an interval of perhaps two minutes, the brothers were found to be securely bound with the same cords, the ends of the ropes being some distance from their hands.

One of the company was then invited to take a seat in the cabinet, so as to assure himself that whatever might be done could not be accomplished by the brothers. A gentleman having volunteered to be imprisoned in such mysterious company, his hands were securely tied to the knees of the Davenports, whose hands were fastened behind their backs by cords passed through the holes in the bench. Their feet were also tied together with a sailor's knot. A tamborine was then laid in the gentleman's lap, upon which a guitar and a violin were placed, as also the trumpet and a couple of handbells. Any interference with these articles by the gentleman in whose lap they were deposited was rendered impossible by reason of his hands being tied. He states that the instant the doors were closed hands were passed over his face and head, his hair was gently pulled, and the whole of the musical instruments were played upon; the bells were also rung violently close to his face, and the tamborine beat time on his head.

After describing a number of other "manifestations" paraded before the group by the brothers, the article sums up by mentioning that throughout the performance "... the cabinet was minutely inspected, and every possible precaution taken to bind the hands and feet of the persons whose presence appeared to be essential to the development of the manifestations."

Omitted from this account, possibly because of the limited space allotted the reporter, were a couple of choice items from the Davenports' bag of tricks that never failed to convince their followers all the more, and to confuse the skeptics. Midway in the performance, the knots in the ropes were covered with melted wax. Once it had hardened, the wax served as a seal which would have to be broken if the knots were to be untied. Nevertheless, as soon as the doors were closed, the strumming, banging, and tossing about of the musical instruments began anew. Needless to say, subsequent examination of the knots disclosed that the wax seals were unbroken. As a sort of final clincher near the end of their performance, loose dry flour was spooned into each of the brothers' hands and Dr. Ferguson (probably sighing at need to go to such lengths to convert nonbelievers) would point out that the Davenports could hardly succeed in releasing themselves without first releasing the flour held in their hands. However, the closing of the doors was again the signal for the start of the spirit jamboree within the cabinet. As might be expected, later examination of the tightly tied brothers showed that they were still clutching the flour.

Of all the so-called spiritualists to gain recognition during and after the Davenports' reign, none came close to matching the brothers in their ability to interest,

entertain, and mystify. Had the Davenports been content to offer their demonstration as conjuring, they would have caused a stir; as spirit mediums they whipped up a storm. For them it was a choice between small or large bank accounts, thin or fat billfolds. The Davenports settled for the spirits and the busy box office, though there must have been times when, forced to maintain a safe distance between themselves and angry crowds of "anti-Davenportites," the brothers would have preferred physical to financial security.

In 1873, the Davenports decided to perform one final escape, this time away from the self-created storm that had been boiling about their heads for almost two decades. In short, they decided to give up the ghosts. Their retreat into the more serene atmosphere of retirement was none too soon. As their fame had grown, so too had the indignation of magicians everywhere who were incensed at seeing trickery used to fleece the gullible, rather than to entertain.

On the theory that it takes a trickster to catch a trickster, magicians scoffed as learned scientists and researchers speculated on whether the spirits were or were not responsible for the antics produced by the Davenports. Instead, magicians on both sides of the Atlantic settled the matter on the brothers' own home grounds: the stage and the platform. They hit the brothers hard and in a way that hurt the most, by duplicating everything the Davenports did, right down to the last slipknot. Disciples of the Davenports gasped in disbelief as they watched the so-called "impossibilities," hitherto accepted as the work of the spirits, performed by professional magicians.

John Nevil Maskelyne, the Englishman destined to

become one of the great figures in magic as well as one of spiritualism's staunchest opponents, joined with a fellow countryman, George Cooke, and, as far back as 1865, recreated the Davenport act in its entirety. Later, the leading American magician of the late 1800's, Harry Kellar, toured the world with a mammoth magic show in which he featured his version of the Davenport act. Eventually, cabinets similar to the one used by the Davenports became standard equipment in most of the larger magic shows and the so-called "spirit manifestations" were paraded before a worldwide audience as tricks — nothing more.

In 1895, twenty-odd years after he had tiptoed into retirement, Ira Davenport decided to dust off the old ghost-raising act with the aid of a partner named George Fay (Brother William had died shortly after retirement). The attempted comeback was a quick and complete failure. The magicians had done their work well.

The methods used by the Davenports combined skill, speed, and subtlety, with a generous sprinkling of nerve and showmanship to add zest and sparkle to their performances. The act was divided into two parts. The first part demonstrated excellent and rapid escape work, climaxed when the brothers were revealed to be completely untied. The second, and more dramatic, half of the act began when, within a minute or two of their liberation, the brothers were found to be completely and mysteriously retied. It was after this second binding of the brothers, this time by "spirits" rather than spectators, that the act began to warm up.

Houdini, who did considerable research into the methods of the Davenports, explains\* that their method

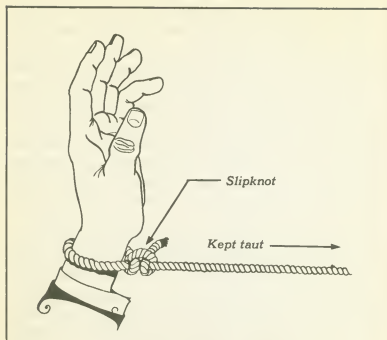
\* *A Magician Among the Spirits* by Harry Houdini. Harper, 1924.

of freeing themselves at the start of the act was "simple" — and by Houdini's standards it probably was. Since, after the wrists and legs of one brother had been tied, the rest of the rope was extended across the cabinet and used to bind the second brother, it follows, as Houdini points out, that one brother had merely to strain forward and extend his legs outward while the other brother did the reverse. This cooperative push-pull action produced sufficient slack in the rope attached to the wrists of one of the brothers to enable him to free his hands. Houdini mentions that vaseline smeared over the wrists, simplified this phase of the escape.

The category of "escape magic" is a complex offshoot of legitimate conjuring and involves many principles too technical and detailed to be described here. Nevertheless, since the Davenports' immediate and pressing problem, after the doors snapped shut, was to free their hands, it should be mentioned that the end of a length of rope cannot be tied *around* an object (in this case, a wrist) without producing an actual, or potential, slipknot. Figure 76 will convey the general idea.

No matter how carefully the end of the rope ("A") is tied around the long section ("B") the result will be a slipknot, a knot, that is, that will slide back and forth along the longer section of the rope ("B"). To put it another way, the result will be an adjustable noose. Of course, if section B is not kept taut during the tying of the knot, or if soft rope is used, trouble will develop. Under such circumstances, we would still have the makings of a slipknot, but it might require the strength of a Samson to prove it. Realizing this, the Davenports kept their nimble wits about them while the knots were being tied, and always made certain that stiff, thick ropes were used.

(Figure 76)



The time required for the Davenports to make a complete escape varied, but, with few exceptions, they could free themselves with breathtaking speed. Usually it wasn't too difficult a task, as the spectators doing this tying invariably developed stagefright and willingly and hurriedly followed directions. When an occasional spectator — perhaps someone with a knowledge of ropes and knots — tied them too securely, the brothers would concentrate on freeing at least one hand so that the rest of the ropes could be sliced through with a small knife they carried with them for just such emergencies. As will be explained, the mutilation of the ropes went unnoticed because of the introduction of a second set of ropes during the latter part of the show.

When the brothers ran into difficulties of this sort, Dr. Ferguson would fill the gap by chatting amiably with the audience, explaining that spirits, because of their capricious nature, could not always be counted on to arrive on time. Due to the lack of an astral timetable, audiences would sometimes sit for extended periods of time while Dr. Ferguson droned on and the Davenports sweated and strained at the ropes. Maskelyne, one of the first magicians to duplicate the brothers' feats, states that on one occasion a half hour elapsed before the manifestations began — a rough night for the Davenport muscles and the doctor's vocal cords.

The second phase of the act, as mentioned, brought into play a duplicate set of ropes. After having stepped from the cabinet completely untied and holding the ropes that previously bound them (if it had been necessary to cut themselves loose, the severed sections *would be concealed in their hands*) the brothers would again retire to the cabinet. Once inside, and with the doors closed, they would remove a duplicate set of ropes from under their coats and, using this same hiding place, would tuck the original ropes out of sight.

This duplicate set was, in reality, a sort of harness made up of a series of slipknots and adjustable loops which the brothers could slide in and out of, at will. Once in the harness, and with the loops formed by the slipknots tightened, the Davenports gave every outward appearance of being helplessly bound. The instant the doors were again snapped shut, however, our heroes would become free agents, could strum guitars, play banjos, blow horns, stroke violins, and wave to the customers out of their little window. Since it took no more than a split second for them to whisk their hands back

into the waiting loops, the manifestations would continue right up to the moment the doors were thrown open.

One of their tricks was to balance instruments on their heads. With their hands back in the loops, these instruments would, by a jerk of their heads, be tossed into the air at the precise moment the doors were flung back. Their timing was such that spectators would see the tied brothers and the falling instruments at the same time. Explain *that* one away, Mr. Skeptic!

As to the wax covering over the knots, it was mere window dressing. If you will refer to Figure 76, it will be obvious that even if the slipknot were covered with wax, the knot, wax and all, can be slid back and forth along the rope. If anything, the wax helps things along by lubricating the rope and making the knot's trip a bit smoother. Caution, of course, has to be exercised so as not to crush the hardened wax covering while the knot is being moved.

The "volunteer" who was invited into the cabinet represented one of the oldest of magicians' props: the confederate, or stooge. The Davenports usually indulged in a bit more horseplay with this stooge than is reported in the newspaper article I have quoted. Perhaps the boys toned down their high jinks a bit at the London performance in deference to the scientists present. Usually, the gentleman in question would burst from the cabinet as wild-eyed and trembling as an overnight guest in Dracula's castle. His clothes would be disarranged and, to top things off, it would be discovered that he and one of the brothers had exchanged jackets — presumably the work of mischievous spirits.

The most troublesome challenge to magicians who



were determined to duplicate everything the brothers did was the business of the flour-filled hands. One theory held that the cabinet contained a secret pocket into which the flour was dumped and later reclaimed. Another, that the flour was simply piled on the benches and scooped up again when the demonstrations were finished. Somehow, though, neither of these solutions resulted in performances that matched the speed and dash of the Davenport presentations. It remained for Houdini to search out the correct answer. In 1911, the escape king discovered that Ira Davenport was still alive. Houdini tracked him down and got the correct answer. The now seventy-two-year-old ex-ghost-raiser smiled when questioned about the flour. It seems the brothers simply held onto it and used their thumbs and teeth to manipulate the ropes and the musical instruments. As easy as that! How the scientists, the psychic investigators, and the thousands of "believers" would have blushed at the childishly simple explanation.

And now, all that remains are some scattered yellowing references, and a few faded woodcuts, to remind us of the queer-looking cabinet, the cheers and the jeers, the learned arguments pro and con, the jangling instruments, the ropes — the brothers themselves. Yet the Davenports did, I think, contribute something of importance, something worthwhile. By dragging ignorance and gullibility out into the open, and by doing so on a wide scale, they made it possible for qualified and properly trained individuals to expose, for public viewing, the folly of assuming that what cannot be readily explained *must* be inexplicable. Perhaps because of this, they indirectly assisted man in taking another faltering step away from the darkness and superstitions of his

primitive past. For this, if nothing else, the Davenports should, I think, be remembered.

"Houdini, we started it, you finish it." These words were spoken by Ira Davenport on the occasion of his meeting with the escape king back in 1911. For the accuracy of the record, the Davenports didn't start spiritualism nor, as it turned out, did Houdini finish it. However, because of his vast knowledge and his widely publicized name and reputation, Houdini did more than any other man to debunk the frauds that practiced and preached such quackery.

"I'll forfeit this \$10,000," Houdini would shout, waving a fistful of large denomination bills, "if any so-called medium can do anything I can't duplicate by natural means."

It was an impressive challenge and, since Houdini made a point of shouting loud enough for reporters to hear, one that always got him newspaper space.

Not all followers of spiritualism, however, were frauds. Far from it. Many, like Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, were sincere, dedicated seekers after a true and tangible link between the two worlds. Houdini understood, respected, and even joined this search. He did take exception, however, when these well-meaning seekers after the truth set themselves up as judges of what they found, as experts on what was or was not trickery. Houdini was particularly disturbed at the ease with which cheap swindlers could — and too often did — hoodwink these individuals into believing that the sought-after link had been found. He just couldn't understand how the same person who would readily admit to being utterly baffled by the simplest of magician's

tricks could, in the next breath, proclaim some ex-carnival mind reader to be a genuine psychic. This sort of thing was, of course, a violation of the ancient advice that cobblers should stick to their lasts, but to Houdini, who knew every trick in the book, it was a constant source of wonder.

A typical example of Houdini's dilemma occurred in 1923 when *Scientific American*, a leading magazine, promised \$2,500 to anyone who would come forward with a demonstration of genuine psychic phenomena. Houdini, who immediately added \$5,000 of his own to the offer, was joined by three other "investigators" on a committee to check out any and all claims to the money. Shortly thereafter, while away on a vaudeville tour, Houdini received the disconcerting news that the balance of the committee had met up with a "genuine" medium, a young Italian named Nino Pecoraro. A year earlier, Doyle had publicly proclaimed this same young man to be the real thing.

The committee, after sitting in on one of Pecoraro's séances, had agreed with Doyle and were on the verge of counting out the money into the smiling Neopolitan's outstretched hand when Houdini came roaring back to town, demanding to know what had gone on in his absence, what proof had been offered the committee. After describing what amounted to a one-man version of the old Davenport act, with a darkened room substituting for the cabinet, the committee clinched their argument by pointing out to Houdini that the young Italian couldn't possibly be a fake — hadn't they tied him securely with no less than seventy-five feet of rope?

Houdini's reaction to the committee's "proof" is not recorded. He may have laughed, cried, had a fit or, as is

more likely, stared in stunned disbelief. Having been squirming out of ropes from early youth, Houdini assumed it to be common knowledge that the longer the rope, the easier the escape. With patient control, he pointed out to the committee that after they had wrapped Nino up like a hastily buried mummy, the Italian's biggest problem might well have been to keep the rope from accidentally sliding off before the lights were put out.

At Houdini's insistence, another séance was arranged, this time with the escape king himself supervising the tying. Instead of a lengthy rope, Houdini used only a few short pieces of fishline. After a quiet, dark, and uneventful half hour, Nino gave up and called for lights and a pair of scissors.

"Spooks-a no come," he explained sheepishly.

The magazine's money went back into the safe and Houdini went back to his interrupted tour.

## A Simple Spirit Séance

The following explanation of a spirit séance is made up of a series of stunts which the reader can perform. Appropriately enough, it's dead easy.

The performer begins by telling about the ghost craze that swept most of the world not too many years ago. He points out that notwithstanding the efforts of debunkers like Harry Houdini, there were many whose belief in direct communication with the dead remained unshaken.

"People who held to this belief," continues the per-

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former, "readily admitted that the majority of spirit mediums were frauds. No doubt about it. At the same time, however, these people refused to concede that it was *all* a trick. They insisted that if one really and truly wished to contact visiting spirits, such contact could and would be established. And," adds the performer, "a lot of brilliant and famous people believed this to be so. Could they have been right? Suppose we were to conduct a séance right now. Is it possible that we might attract a visitor from the other world? Let's try it and see what happens."

Stating that the first requirement of a séance is to eliminate any possibility of the medium being a trickster, the performer shows four pieces of rope which, he explains, will be used to tie him to a chair, thereby making it impossible for him to take part in whatever manifestations might occur.

Next, the performer shows a sort of makeshift cardboard megaphone. "Mediums often used something like this," he explains, "as a means of amplifying the low voices of the spirits. They called it a spirit trumpet."

He also mentions that spirits frequently made their presence known at séances by ringing bells. "We don't have a bell," the performer adds, "so we'll use this spoon and glass." Saying this, he jangles the spoon in the glass to demonstrate how it can be used as a substitute noisemaker in place of the customary bell.

The megaphone, glass, and spoon are placed on a small table at the center of the room in front of which the performer seats himself on a straight-backed wooden chair.

Two of the onlookers now use two of the ropes to bind the performer's hands and arms. With the remain-

ing two pieces, they secure each of his ankles to the front two chair legs.

A third spectator inspects the knotted ropes to verify that the performer is securely bound hand and foot. This same spectator then takes up his post at the light switch with the understanding that he will turn the lights on or off as directed by the performer.

The performer calls for lights out — and silence. The séance has begun!

The silence and the darkness are complete. Seconds pass. Five, ten, possibly fifteen, and then a low tapping sound is heard. It seems to come from above. It's heard again, this time from over near a corner of the room. A second or two later it's heard again, but now the tapping sound is coming from a different corner.

Next, the performer's voice breaks the silence. "There's something out there," he murmurs ominously, "I think it's trying to make contact."

Again the tapping sound, but now it is much louder and seems to be coming from the table in front of the performer.

"Lights on," commands the performer. There is a snap of the switch and the room is flooded with light, but there is nothing to see that wasn't there before the lights were put out. The table, glass, spoon, and megaphone are all in place, the performer is still tied.

"Lights out." This latest command of the performer again plunges the room into darkness and again the group sits and waits, but not for long. After a few seconds a tiny faint light is seen hovering over the table. Now it travels toward the ceiling. Now it is over the heads of the onlookers. Now it darts back and seems to be floating over the head of the "medium." It makes a

few short circles and, suddenly, the silence is again shattered by the performer's demand for lights.

Again the group of watchers sit blinking in the light, but again there's nothing unusual to see. Though the tiny light was seen up to a split second before the room lights went on, there's no explanation as to what it was or who controlled it. The performer, of course, is still securely tied hand and foot.

Again the lights are extinguished. After ten or fifteen uneventful seconds go by, the performer asks, "Have you left us, spirit?" There is a pause, and then an eerie whistling sound is heard followed by a low mournful "No-o-o-o."

"Tell us, spirit," continues the performer, "are you happy where you are?"

This question is answered by a violent jangling of the spoon in the glass. Again the performer puts a question to the "spirit." "Can you make yourself visible so that we can see you when the lights are on?" This question gets a violent reaction from the "spirit"; the spoon is jangled at a furious rate.

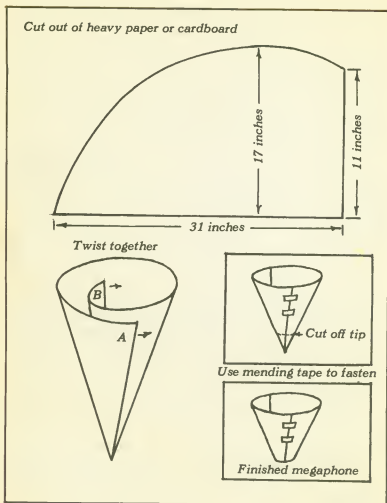
"Quick, we'll catch him. Put the lights on!" shouts the performer.

The lights are snapped on by the assisting spectator to reveal the "spirit trumpet" flying across the room as though thrown by the "spirit" in his haste to outrace the lights.

"I'm afraid the séance is over," says the performer with a rueful smile. "I've frightened our guest away."


The spectators who did the tying examine the ropes to see if the performer is as securely tied as at the start. He is, and they proceed to untie him while he hastens to explain to the onlookers it was all a spoof, an example

(Figure 77)



of how darkness, imagination, and a dash of conjuring can be combined to trick the senses. And although the performer points out what *didn't* cause the so-called "manifestations," he doesn't, of course, explain what did. For in this, as in any other form of magic, the effect is destroyed once you explain the method.



 *Method:* In addition to a room that can be plunged into complete darkness by the flip of a single switch, you will require the following items: four lengths of fairly soft rope, each about four feet long; a makeshift megaphone ("spirit trumpet") which can be easily constructed from cardboard as shown in Figure 77; a six-foot folding carpenter's rule painted a dull black; a luminous bead or ornament of the type used at the end of light cords to make them easy to find in the dark. In addition, you will need the common household articles referred to in description: a wooden table, a straight-backed kitchen chair, and a glass and spoon.

The entire séance centers around the manner in which your hands and arms are tied. The rope, the knots, and the efforts of your volunteer assistants to tie you tightly are genuine enough; nevertheless there's a trick to it that enables you to free yourself with no more time or effort than it takes to blink an eye. The moment the lights are snapped out, your hands are free—and a moment before you call for the lights to be switched on again, your hands and arms are again "securely" bound. And it's really simple since it works because of the way the ropes are handled during the tying, and not because of the performer's skill as an escape artist.

After I have explained the working of this simple escape trick, I will go into detail regarding the séance itself. Because everything hinges on this rope escape, however, it's important to master it before continuing on with the rest of the routine.

You begin by asking the assistance of two of the on-lookers. After seating yourself on the chair, you request that one of the ropes be tied around your right wrist,

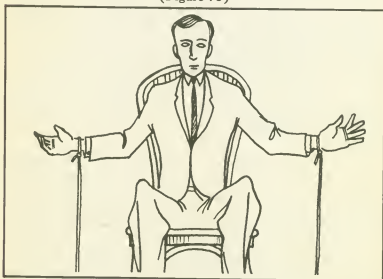
and a second rope around your left wrist. Insist that each of the two assisting spectators satisfy himself that the knots are good and secure and that the portions of the ropes encircling the wrists are sufficiently tight to prevent you from slipping either hand free.

You now address the onlookers and explain that your arms are going to be secured in the same manner as if you were, in effect, being confined in a straitjacket. By way of illustration, you cross your arms in front of you and explain that if the ropes attached to the wrists are fastened behind your back, you would be helpless to use your arms.

"Of course," you continue, "a straitjacket makes use of straps to fasten the arms, but since I don't happen to carry a straitjacket around with me, we'll have to be content to use these ropes."

Saying this, you unfold your arms and hold them

(Figure 78)



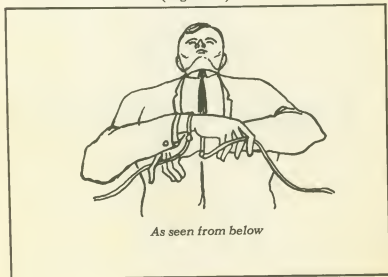
## THE QUICK AND THE DEAD

outstretched to show the ropes dangling from each wrist. (See Figure 78.)

Once again you cross your arms, but here is where the trickery takes place. Outwardly, you appear to do exactly as you did before. In reality, however, you sort of switch things around so that when the two ends are eventually fastened in back of you, your hands and arms can be instantly freed to carry on some of the dark-room shenanigans I have described. Here's how it's done:

As you start to cross your arms in front of you the second time, your hands, quite naturally, must pass each other. As they do so, you secretly hook the rope hanging from the right wrist between the first two fingers of the left hand, and the rope hanging from the left wrist, between the first two fingers of the right hand. (See Figure 79.)

(Figure 79)





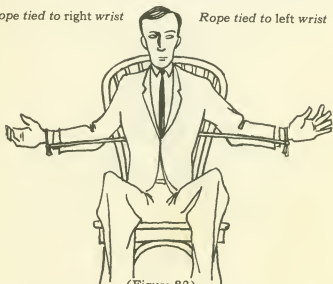
(Figure 80)



(Figure 81)

*Rope tied to right wrist*

*Rope tied to left wrist*



(Figure 82)

This is done while the hands are moving past each other, and it is done without pause. The hands continue to move past each other in opposite directions (see Figure 80) until the arms are again folded as in Figure 81. To all appearances, you have simply crossed your arms. The evidence of your chicanery is safely hidden away behind your crossed arms.

All this takes place in considerably less time than it takes to tell about it. With a little practice, it can be done without hesitation and without arousing suspicion.

You now sit back in the chair and direct your two volunteers to insert the ends of the ropes through the rungs in the chair back and to tie each rope around one of the rungs.

The tying of your ankles to the chair legs is legitimate. You can let the two spectators pull and strain as much as they please since you have no intention of trying to free your legs anyway.

And there we have 90 per cent of the secret of this little séance. You appear to be safely under wraps, but, actually, all you need do when the proper moment arrives is open your arms and, though the ropes are still fastened to the wrists and chair, your arms and hands have more than enough freedom to attend to the requirements of this séance. (See Figure 82.)

Once you have mastered the timing of the exchange of ropes (practice in front of a mirror until you all but fool yourself), the rest of the activities, you will find, are as brazen and effortless as cheating at solitaire.

At the outset, the black carpenter's rule and the luminous bead or ornament are tucked away in some convenient pocket. The megaphone and the glass and spoon are on a table within reaching distance.

The carpenter's rule, incidentally, has a hole bored within an inch or two of its end. The luminous bead is attached to a small loop of stiff wire (the wire hooks used for Christmas tree ornaments are ideal for this purpose) to enable it to be quickly hooked to the end of the rule.

After you have been "securely" tied, and the lights have been turned off, unfold your arms, bring out the carpenter's rule and open it to its full length. With your arm outstretched, raise the now extended rule toward a far corner of the room and slowly tap the ceiling a few times. Switch the rule over to the other hand and proceed to tap the ceiling in another corner.

This done, fold the rule, return it to your pocket and reach out and rap your knuckles against the tabletop. Quickly recross your arms and call for the lights to be turned back on.

After the spectators have had a chance to observe that you are still tied, have the lights turned out again and remove both the luminous bead and the rule from your pocket. Shield the glow of the bead with your hand as you hook it into the hole at the end of the rule, and then let it be seen as you slowly unfold the rule.

As mentioned earlier in the description of the séance, cause the light to float around the room by swinging the rule about in different directions and then slowly refold the rule. With your free hand, unhook the bead and continue to move it about as, with the other hand, you drop the rule into a convenient pocket.

Raise the bead over your head and then, suddenly, close your hand over it. Quickly cross your arms and call for lights. The strange light, which appeared to float about the room, into distant corners and over the

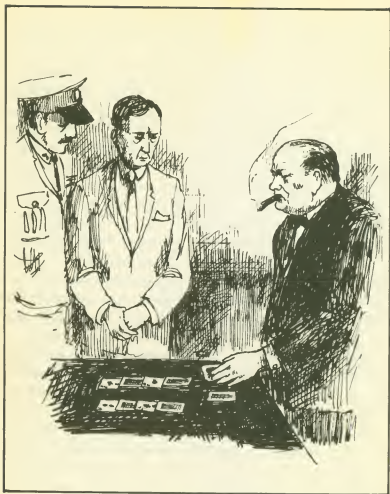
heads of the spectators, is now hidden away in your hand.

Again, at your direction, the lights are put out and the bead, hidden from view by your hand, is placed in your pocket.

The low mournful spirit voice is, of course, your own. By pressing your mouth against the mouthpiece of the megaphone, and by pitching your voice low, it's surprisingly easy to create an eerie voice that seems to come from a far distance, a voice that will not be associated with your own. The jangling of the spoon is simply a matter of reaching out in the dark and doing just that.

The climax of the séance is one of the oldest tricks of the fake medium. You place the megaphone on your head, duncecap fashion, fold your arms and, with a quick jerk of your head, flip the megaphone into the air. At the same instant, you call for illumination. If the spectator assigned to the switch acts on your request promptly, the flood of light will reveal you sitting motionless in your chair while the megaphone sails through the air.

It should be self-evident that the success of stunts of this type depends, to a great extent, on the performer's ability to create the proper mood and interest. To this end, some appropriate music from a low-toned record player will help considerably.





# THE MIND REELS

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One of the highest satisfactions that comes to the inventor of tricks is to learn that his magic has given pleasure to an audience he esteems. I speak from experience. Here's a story about one of my best-known tricks.

It seems that one evening during World War II a group of Winston Churchill's friends arranged a dinner party in an attempt to lighten, if only for an hour or so, the burdensome responsibilities that went with being a wartime prime minister.

The dinner proved to be a pleasant, relaxing, and welcome interlude in Churchill's hectic, almost round-the-clock, schedule. But eventually duty called and even as "Winnie" lighted his after-dinner cigar, he realized he was behind time and at that moment he should have been on his way to an evening session of parliament. However, friends prevailed upon the Prime Minister to linger a moment or two, just long enough to permit magician Harry Green to demonstrate a new and baffling card trick.

Green flipped open a deck of cards and, selecting a red and a black card at random, tossed these two cards face up, a foot or two apart, on the dinner table in front of the Prime Minister. Then he handed Churchill the balance of the pack.

Churchill, following instructions, held the pack face down and dealt the cards into two face-down piles. As each card was dealt, he *guessed* its color. If he guessed the card to be black, he placed it — still face down — in one pile; if his hunch told him that the card was red, he put it into a second pile. The two original face-up cards served as guides as to which pile was red, and which black. This guessing game continued until Churchill had dealt his way through the entire pack.

After pointing out the unlikelihood of all of Churchill's guesses being correct,\* the magician turned the two piles face up. To the Prime Minister's utter astonishment it was revealed that he had actually, and unwittingly, separated the reds from the blacks! After some thoughtful chewing on one of his famous long black cigars, Churchill leaned forward and asked to see the trick again.

Green complied. Again the Prime Minister dealt through the face-down deck, this time more slowly and deliberately. Again guesswork was the determining factor as to whether the cards went into one pile or the other.

And again an astonished Churchill learned that he had separated the reds and the blacks!

Between his insisting that the trick be performed again and again (six times in all) and mulling over its solution after each such performance, the hours slipped

\* The odds are over 200 trillion to one against it!

by. Finally giving it up, Churchill left to keep his belated appointment. The *London Times*, in reporting the incident, noted that when he finally arrived at parliament at 2 A.M., the Prime Minister was "befogged."

What follows is an explanation — appearing in a book for the first time — of this same red-black trick that so thoroughly and repeatedly baffled Winston Churchill, as well as practically everyone else who has seen it performed. It's known to my friends and to magicians generally as —

## Out of this World

The *broad* effect of this trick is as already described: a spectator apparently deals a face-down pack into two piles and, though guided by guesswork alone, succeeds in separating the colors. Incredibly enough, it really works — and every time, too!

Here's what happens — *not what the spectators remember later*, but what *actually* happens.

The performer brings out a face-down pack of cards and starts to turn the cards face up one at a time, dealing them into two face-up piles. In one pile he puts the cards that are red, in the other the cards that are black. After a few cards have been thus dealt into each pile, the performer explains that if he were to continue in this manner, it would merely be a question of time until all the red and black cards would be face up on the table, each color in its own pile.

"Nothing remarkable in this," the performer comments. "I simply note the color of each card and place

it in its proper pile. But," he continues, "wouldn't it be strange if the reds and the blacks could be separated *without* looking at the faces!"

As he says this, the performer gathers up all but two of the cards and shoves them back into the pack. The two cards left behind remain face up on the table at some distance from each other. One card is red, the other black.

Handing the pack to a spectator the performer instructs him to deal the cards into red and black piles, as demonstrated, but to do so with the cards *face down* — *without looking at the face of a single card*.

"Since under such conditions you won't know the red cards from the black," the performer explains, "you will have to guess at the colors."

The performer points to the face-up red card on the table. "On this card I want you to deal all those cards you think are red. On the other face-up card, the black one, I want you to deal all the cards you think are black." He stresses that the cards are to be dealt singly and are to be left face down until the entire pack has been dealt.


After the spectator has dealt through about half of the pack, he is stopped by the performer who, as if acting upon an afterthought, announces that he will prove conclusively that the spectator's "guesses" are being controlled by mysterious forces. Reaching over, the performer glances through the undealt half pack held by the spectator and removes two cards, a red and a black. Calling these two cards "new *guide* cards," he states he is going to switch things around. Accordingly, he places the red card *face up* on top of the supposedly black pile, and the black card *face up* on the "red" pile.

## THE MIND REELS

The performer explains that, from this moment on, the spectator is to separate his red and black "guesses" in accordance with these new guide cards. In other words, the spectator will now deal those cards he thinks are red onto the pile previously reserved for the "black" cards — while the cards he now guesses to be black will be dealt onto the former "red" pile.

The spectator shuffles the cards yet to be dealt and continues to deal until all the cards are on the table.

I'm not exaggerating when I say that up to this point the spectators will be skeptical as to the outcome of this rather fantastic undertaking. The surprise then, when the two piles are dealt through to disclose that the colors have really been separated, is astounding to say the least! Although the spectator controlled the dealing from start to finish, he will find that each of the two "guide" cards in each half has above it a group of cards of the corresponding color!

 **Method:** Prior to performance, the pack of cards (it must be a full pack of fifty-two cards) has been secretly arranged, as follows:

Remove three reds and four blacks from a deck and mix these seven cards together. Separate the reds from the blacks in the remainder of the deck and, with the face-down reds on top of the face-down blacks, drop the mixed seven on top of all.

To perform, hold the face-down pack (mixed group at the top) in the left hand, and begin dealing the cards one at a time, turning them face up as you do so. If the first card you turn up is red, place it at your left, if it is black, place it at your right. Continue in this manner until the top seven cards are face up on the

table, in separate piles according to color.

As things now stand, you are holding a face-down pack of cards, all the red cards of which are in the upper half, the blacks in the lower. On the table, to your left, are three face-up red cards. To the right are four face-up black cards.

At this point you stop the deal and speculate aloud on the possibility of separating the colors without looking at the faces of the cards. Supposedly, you have simply dealt out a few cards by way of demonstrating how the red and black cards would have to be separated under normal conditions. In reality you are impressing the onlookers with the fact that the colors are mixed — *you do not, however, mention this point.*

Next, pick up all but one of the red cards from the table and insert them face down into the *upper* (red) half of the face-down pack. Do the same with all but one of the black cards — except that you return these black cards to the *lower* (black) half of the pack.

Hand the face-down pack to a spectator with the request that he deal the cards into two face-down piles. You instruct him to guess at the color of each face-down card and to deal it onto whichever of the two face-up cards matches his guess. In effect, the two face-up cards act as *guides* or *indicators*. If the spectator has a hunch that a particular card is *red*, it goes on top of the *red* guide card. If his hunch tells him the card is *black*, it is dealt on the *black* guide card. And so it continues, the red guesses building up on the red guide card, the black guesses on the black guide card.

And all you (the magician) have to do is to silently count the cards as they are dealt onto the table. Immediately after the *twenty-fourth* card has been dealt, you stop the deal.

The twenty-four cards just dealt into two reasonably equal piles (depending on the manner in which the spectator "guessed" the colors) will be made up entirely of *red* cards. The balance of the pack — those not yet dealt — are face down in the spectator's hand and are all *black* with the exception of the top *red* card.

Having stopped the deal, you ask the spectator whether he was conscious of a strange force that more or less compelled him to deal some cards to the left and others to the right. In all probability, he will deny the presence of any such force, but whether he does or not, you declare that you will arrange matters so as to prove beyond question that there is a force working to upset the laws of probability.

Reach over and take the top card of the undealt half still in the spectator's possession. Show this card to be red and drop it face up on top of the pile which, up to this point, had been reserved for the black cards. Take the next card from the half held by the spectator, look at its face *without allowing anyone to see its color*. Place this card back on top and remove the card beneath it, which, after you note its color, you turn face up for all to see. It is black, and you place it face up on the remaining "red" pile. The point in looking at a card, putting it back, and taking another is to convey the idea that the first card was red and, since you wanted a black card, you put it back because you had no use for it. This, of course, is not so since all the cards not yet dealt are black.

Ask the spectator to shuffle the half deck he is holding (since all cards are now the same color the shuffle disturbs nothing) and to resume dealing — this time guided by the two new face-up cards. This means that

the spectator will now deal his red "guesses" onto the pile at the right, and his black "guesses" onto the pile at the left — exactly the opposite of the way the cards were being handled at the start.

By this time the reader will have a fairly good understanding of the trick and how it is worked and should, therefore, realize why it is necessary to switch colors midway in the deal. When you perform the trick you pretend you are changing the color designations of the piles, in the middle of the deal, to prove that the separation of the colors is under some mysterious control. The truth is that the switch is necessary or else the trick won't work. Interestingly enough, however, this so-called "proof" becomes one of the truly strong points in the trick's climax.

The spectator continues dealing and guessing. The cards he thinks are red go on the new red *guide* card, the cards he thinks are black, on the new black *guide*.

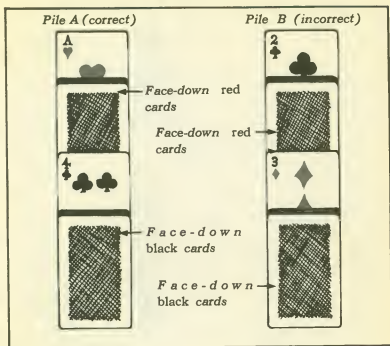
During this second half of the deal, you are in a position to introduce a delightfully baffling little interlude. At any point, you stop the deal, reach over and touch your forefinger to the back of the last card dealt on the so-called *red* pile and ask, "Is this card supposed to be red?"

Naturally the spectator will reply that it is. You shake your head in pretended disappointment and remark, "What a shame — and you were doing so well, too."

To prove that your disappointment is well-founded, you turn up the card in question (the top card of the "red" pile) to show that it is black. (It has to be black, of course, since nothing but black cards are being dealt at this point.) Sadly, you transfer this misplaced card



(Figure 83)

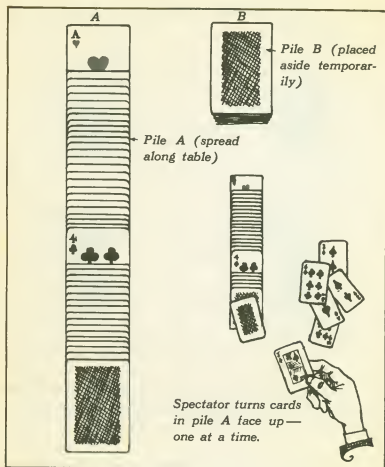


to its proper "black" pile — and direct that the dealing continue. Finally, all the cards have been dealt and the two piles will appear as in Figure 83.

Note that the pile marked "A"—the pile that started off as *red* and ended up as *black*—is already in the proper order as far as the colors of the guide cards are concerned.

Pile "B," however, is all *wrong*. Things in that pile are the direct opposite of what they should be: *red* cards are on top of the *black* guide card and *black* cards are above the *red* guide. Pick up this "wrong" pile and place it aside for the moment.

(Figure 84)



With the wrong pile temporarily out of the way, spread the other half ("A") face down along the table as shown in Figure 84.

Review events up to this point and then, as a climax, request that the spectator turn the cards in pile "A" face up, one at a time. The spectator does as directed, turn-

ing up black card after black card. Finally he reaches the center point in the pile, the point at which the black *guide* card appears.

Tell him to place this black guide card aside and remind everyone that it was at this point that you (the magician) decided to switch things about as a means of proving that this fantastic guessing game was really being controlled by an unknown force.

"If what I say is true," you state dramatically, "the cards should be of a different color starting right at this point." You instruct the spectator to continue turning the cards face up and — wonder of wonders — the balance of the pile consists entirely of red cards! The surprise caused by the successful separation of the colors in pile "A" is more than ample to enable you to casually dispose of the problem of the mismatched guide cards in pile "B."

While everyone is marveling over the fantastic outcome of the trick as demonstrated by pile "A," you simply turn pile "B" face up and spread it along the table with the remark, "And of course, the reds and the blacks in the other half are also separate."

With this remark, you openly pluck the face-down guide cards from the face-up spread and flip them out onto the table so that they mix with the cards already there. Thus the clues are destroyed and the spectators are left to ponder what my colleagues assure me is a truly astonishing and baffling bit of modern magic — the type of magic that confuses the mind rather than the eye.

## The Case of the Missing Hat

The magician shows a stack of twenty small cards, about the size customarily associated with business cards. Ten of the cards are white, the remaining ten, brown. He draws the attention of the onlookers to the fact that each white card bears the sketch of a magician, while on each brown card there is a drawing of a shiny top hat. These drawings are on one side of the cards only, the remaining sides are left blank.

Adopting his best storytelling manner, the performer explains, "I'm going to use these cards to demonstrate the strangest and most baffling crime in the history of Scotland Yard.

"It happened on a Halloween night a few years ago when the ten greatest magicians in the world gathered at an ancient English inn for their annual meeting. The best detectives at the Yard are still working on the case. The real problem seems to be that the detectives can't figure out exactly what it is they're supposed to figure out! As things stand at the moment, everyone at the Yard is looking for a thief *who hasn't stolen anything!* And, what's more, they seem to be trying to recover something that *isn't missing!* If all this sounds confusing, there's good reason. Watch as I reconstruct the crime!"

The performer slowly deals the white cards, the picture sides up, onto the table in a row, counting them as he does so. There are exactly ten of these white cards, each of which shows the sketch of a magician. "Ten magicians," says the performer, "let's not forget that there are exactly *ten* magicians."

So saying, and by way of emphasis, he just as slowly picks the cards up from the table one at a time — again counting them. This second count serves to verify that there are, indeed, ten white cards — no more and no less.

"And for each of the ten magicians — a hat." The performer now proceeds to deal the *brown* cards onto the table in a long row, counting them aloud as he does so. No doubt about it, there are ten hats (brown cards).

"Now," continues the performer, "here is where the trouble started. The ten magicians went into their meeting room [the performer hands the stack of white cards to a spectator] and left their ten hats with the hat-check girl." Again the performer counts the ten brown cards, tapping each one as he does so, but leaving them in a row on the table.

"And then, with the ten magicians in their meeting room, disaster struck! The hatcheck girl took her eyes off the line of hats for just a brief moment and, when she looked again, one of the hats was gone — it had been stolen!"

By way of demonstrating the theft, the performer openly takes one of the "hats" (one of the brown cards) and slips it into a pocket. This leaves *nine* cards in the row on the table.

"You can imagine the consternation of the manager of the inn when the hatcheck girl broke the news. Every year for over a century the venerable magic society had chosen the inn for its annual meeting — and now this has happened.

"The magicians would *never* come back. What a disgrace! Scotland Yard was called in, but it was of no avail. The detectives could find no clues, no suspects,

no fingerprints. And then, at a few minutes to midnight, the meeting-room door opened and out stepped the first of the ten magicians. He was The Great Sleeveo."

The performer instructs the spectator who holds the stack of white cards to deal one of the cards onto the table. The performer refers to this card as "The Great Sleeveo" and puts it aside (or gives it to one of the spectators to hold) for the rest of the trick, while he continues with his story.

"In a split second, the keen-eyed Sleeveo had surveyed the scene — the weeping hatcheck girl, the frantic manager, the frustrated detectives, the nine hats on the shelf — and realized what had happened. 'Do not cry, young lady,' he said, patting the cheek of the hatcheck girl, 'I, The Great Sleeveo, will solve your problem. Just pay attention to what I say. I was the *first* magician out of the room — right? For the time being I won't take my hat — but, look, here comes the *second* magician; give him *his* hat.'"

When the performer mentions that a "*second*" magician is leaving the meeting room, he requests the spectator who holds the stack of white cards to deal a second card onto the table.

"So, the hatcheck girl did as the magician instructed and gave the *second* magician his hat."

As this is said, the performer takes one of the brown "hat" cards from the row, drops it on top of the white "magician" card, and places both cards in his pocket to signify that the *second* magician departed with his hat.

The performer continues the story in the same fashion. One by one — the third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh eighth, and ninth magicians — each leave the meeting room (the spectator deals a white card onto the table)


and each is given a "hat" from the row on the table (a brown "hat" card is placed on top of the white "magician" card) and the magician, with hat, leaves the inn (both white and brown cards are put away in one of the performer's pockets).

Oddly enough, after the ninth magician has left with his hat, it is found that there is still one hat (brown card) left on the table! The one white card that was put aside at the beginning (the card that represented The Great Sleeve) is now called to everyone's attention. The story is continued.

"After the *nine* magicians had left, *each with a hat*, The Great Sleeve bowed to the hatcheck girl. 'My nine colleagues have departed with their hats,' he said with a mysterious smile, 'and now, I will take this last remaining hat and be on my way.'"

The performer picks up the last brown ("hat") card from the table, matches it up with the last of the white ("magician") cards, and puts both away in his pocket.

"And that," he says to finish the story, "is Scotland Yard's dilemma. They *know* that there were *ten* magicians. They *know* that there were *nine* hats. Yet each of the *ten* magicians left the inn with a hat. Impossible, of course, but it happened!"

 **Method:** The trick requires some advance preparation, but once you have made up the cards you will have the makings of a minor miracle on your hands, one whose secret is extremely well hidden.

First you will have to get some card stock of the kind customarily used for index cards. You can use actual business cards (blank, of course) provided you can obtain a brand with a smooth finish, easy to handle.

(Figure 85)



White card

(Figure 86)



Brown card



## THE MIND REELS

You will need two colors. In this description I refer to white and brown. Any two colors will do as well, however.

The next step in your preparation calls for some simple art work. Using black ink you must sketch a magician on one side of each of ten white cards and a shiny top hat on one side of each of ten brown cards. The drawings on the cards, incidentally, are not expected to be of professional quality. The sketches are simply supposed to represent some more or less crude drawings you are using to help you tell your story. In fact, the less professional they look, the less suspicion they will arouse.

To guide you, our artist has drawn Figures 85 and 86 which you can either copy or trace. You will note that each card contains a narrow border at the edge. The importance of this border will be explained shortly.

Having completed the necessary art work, select one of the "magician" drawings (white card) and one of the "hats" (brown card) and glue these two cards together, back to back. When the glue has dried, rub some black ink around the edge of this double card so as to hide the fact that it consists of two cards glued together as one.

Properly constructed, this double-face card should appear to be just another of the white cards when it is placed on a table white side up—or just another brown card when it is brown side up. The purpose of the border, and of rubbing black ink around the edge is, of course, to prevent the different colored edges on this double card from being apparent. You are now ready to perform the trick, or at least to go through one or two dry runs to get *ready* to perform it.

To arrange the cards prior to performance, put the double card aside for the moment, and place the stack of nine white cards and the stack of nine brown cards next to each other on the table — *blank sides up* (drawings toward the table).

Next, take the double card and, with the *brown* side (the drawing of the hat) uppermost, drop this double card on top of the face-down white stack.

Following this, pick up the *brown* stack and turn it over so that the drawings of the hats are up. Drop this now *face-up* brown stack on top of the double card.

You now have two groups of cards back to back (the plain sides of the cards are referred to as "backs") and separated from each other by a double card. If you spread the cards, you will be able to count ten brown (hat) cards face up, followed by *nine* face-down white cards. On the other hand, should you turn the cards over, you would have the reverse: *ten* face-up white (magician) cards on top of *nine* face-down brown (hat) cards. Figure 87 should show how the stack of cards appears at this point.

To perform this trick, begin to tell the story of the annual meetings of the ten magicians at the inn, holding the stack of cards with the white (magician) cards uppermost. When you come to the appropriate point in the story, count the magician cards in a row on the table. There will be ten white cards, the last of which will be the double card (white side up, of course).

By way of emphasizing that there really are *ten* magicians, recount the cards, this time from the table back onto the face-down brown cards in your hand. In this second count, you start off by picking up and returning the double card, and then you continue with

(Figure 87)



the nine other white cards, counting each one as you return it to the stack. This second count, of course, verifies that there are ten magicians and results in the double card being back in the center of the stack, between the two groups of nine.

Your story next calls for a count of the hats. To do this you simply and openly turn the entire stack over to bring the brown cards uppermost. One by one, in a row along the table, you count out the brown (hat) cards. Here again you will account for ten since the

last card dealt in the row will be the double card, this time — brown side uppermost, of course.

The story continues to the point at which the "ten" magicians retire to their meeting room. The exit of the magicians to the seclusion of the meeting room is signified by handing over to a spectator the stack of white cards left in your hand after you dealt off the row of brown cards.

Naturally, the onlookers will suppose that the white stack you are handing to the spectator consists of *ten* cards (and why not? After all you've openly counted them *twice* to prove that there are *ten*). Because of the double card, however, the stack you have just given to the spectator consists of only *nine* cards (the tenth white card is glued to the underside of the last brown card in the row on the table — remember?).

All that now remains is to follow the story and, strangely enough, everything works out automatically.

The magician relates how one of the hats is stolen and, suiting the action to the word, he openly "steals" one of the brown (hat) cards by removing it from the row and openly placing it in one of his pockets. Needless to say, the hat that is taken from the table at this point is none other than the *double card*. (Thus, we not only illustrate the theft of one of the hats in keeping with the story, but we also get rid of the only clue to how the trick is accomplished.)

This leaves us nine "hats" on the table while the spectator is holding *nine* "magicians" (white cards). However, everyone is under the impression that the spectator is clutching *ten* white cards.

What remains to be done is to match off each of the nine magicians with a hat. No problem, of course, since

## THE MIND REELS

there are nine hats. The trick comes in, however, in hiding the fact that one of the white cards is among the missing. In short, we want to make the nine white cards look like ten — and to do so in a manner to fool even the most astute spectator. How? It's really easy — and agonizingly deceptive.

For the sake of clarity, I'll break the explanation down step by step. The whole thing will be a lot clearer if you first make up the cards and have them at hand as you follow these steps:

Step 1: The *first* magician emerges from the meeting room, which means you reach over and take one of the white cards from the spectator. In keeping with the story, you refer to this first magician as The Great Sleeveo, and place him aside temporarily.

We now have: 8 white cards held by the spectator  
9 brown cards on the table  
(1 white card off to one side temporarily)

Step 2: The second magician emerges from the meeting room. In keeping with the story, this *second* magician is given a hat and he leaves the inn — which means that you take a white (magician) card from the spectator, pick up one of the brown (hat) cards from the table, and place both the white card and the brown card in your pocket.

We now have: 7 white cards held by the spectator  
8 brown cards on the table

Step 3: The third magician emerges from the meeting room (you take a white card from the spectator), is given his hat (you take a brown card from the table), and leaves the inn (you place both cards in your pocket).

#### MAGICIAN'S MAGIC

We now have: 6 white cards held by the spectator  
7 brown cards on the table

Step 4: The *fourth* magician follows the same procedure, which leaves:

5 white cards held by the spectator  
6 brown cards on the table

Step 5: The *fifth* magician follows the same procedure, which leaves:

4 white cards held by the spectator  
5 brown cards on the table

Step 6: The *sixth* magician follows the same procedure, which leaves:

3 white cards held by the spectator  
4 brown cards on the table

Step 7: The *seventh* magician follows the same procedure, which leaves:

2 white cards held by the spectator  
3 brown cards on the table

Step 8: The *eighth* magician follows the same procedure, which leaves:

1 white card held by the spectator  
2 brown cards on the table

Step 9: The *ninth* magician follows the same procedure, which leaves:

0 white cards held by the spectator  
1 brown card on the table

Step 10: At this point you call attention to The Great Sleeve who, supposedly, is directing operations up to now. As the story goes, Sleeve now remarks, "My *nine* colleagues have departed with their hats, and now I, Sleeve — the *tenth* magician — will take this last remaining hat and will be on my way."

You pick up the last of the brown cards, match it

#### THE MIND REELS

with the last white card ("Sleevo") and put away both in your pocket.

If, in reading this "Method" you are still wondering how the trick is done, your confusion is understandable. All I can do by way of further clarification is go back to my original recommendation that you make up the cards and go through the instructions with the cards in hand.

What happens is that you throw the spectators a *double* curve: the first, when you clearly count *ten* magicians, but end up with *nine* (thanks to the double card), and the second, when you count The Great Sleevo twice: in Step 1, he is the *first* magician out of the meeting room; in Step 10, he, in effect, becomes the *tenth* magician as well.





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